

Poetry after Auschwitz: An Italian Perspective

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PhD Thesis

I, Bethany Sarah Gaunt, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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[Signature]

Abstract

This thesis offers a critical engagement with poetry about Auschwitz¹ in all its various permutations, addressing issues such as why poetry is a particularly valuable form of Holocaust expression, and why different social groups have historically chosen to, and continue to, write poetry about Auschwitz. Adopting an analytical approach, this work foregrounds the poetical works themselves, in order to demonstrate how poetry facilitates an engagement with the past, for both the writer and reader (or indeed, singer and listener).

Beginning with the work of those who experienced the Nazi camps first-hand, chapter one discusses the poetry of two survivors, Edith Bruck (b. 1932) and Primo Levi (1919-1987), identifying three driving motivations behind survivor-writing: to memorialise, to inform and to assist in the writer's cathartic rehabilitation after Auschwitz.

The second chapter offers a comparative analysis of two poems by Salvatore Quasimodo (1901-1968) and two of Francesco Guccini's (b. 1940) *canzoni d'autore*, exploring how these two artists introduced Auschwitz into their respective genres, and how they interpreted and enacted what they perceived as art's post-Holocaust imperative: to rebuild mankind.

Chapter three engages with Italian translations of Paul Celan's (1920-1970) famous 'Todesfuge', exploring the significance of translators in the dissemination of Holocaust writing, and their role as expert intermediate readers. The chapter champions reading multiple translations in parallel, and demonstrates the ways in which different translators foreground different elements of the original work.

Finally, chapter four offers an assessment of online poetry about Auschwitz. By focusing on Italian poetry website "Scrivere" and the work of Giorgia Spurio (b. 1986), this chapter discusses the democratisation of art online, the extra-textual possibilities the internet offers, and how these contemporary poems build upon

¹ Intended metonymically to stand for the Holocaust.

previous Holocaust poems, perpetuating the poetical discussion of the Holocaust for a new generation of readers.

Impact Statement

Public interest and formal study of the Holocaust continues to grow, and the imperative to deepen our understanding of the events of the past becomes more pressing as the number of survivors dwindle. This thesis offers a new approach to the poetry written about Auschwitz and demonstrates ways in which this body of literature can be studied in order to develop our comprehension, not only of what survivors underwent in the camps, but also of how society has attempted to come to terms with the Holocaust in the decades afterwards.

This work has much to offer the academic fields of literature, Italian studies and history in terms of new methodologies and pioneering areas of research. The thesis adapts an existing literary approach which has traditionally focused on understanding a text, in order to facilitate an understanding of what the text means in a wider sense, as a window into a survivor's unique insight into the Holocaust, and a reflection of society's response to atrocity. A chapter on internet poetry also breaks new ground, offering a working methodology for the curation and presentation of online texts, as well as an example of how to engage with and comment on the extra-textual dimensions of this growing body of works. Despite the exponential growth of internet-usage in recent years, the study of online texts has not yet become mainstream within academia, and this thesis provides evidence of the value and utility of focusing on these emerging works.

The methodology adopted and advocated in this thesis for engaging with poetical texts is also of benefit for a non-academic audience, as was demonstrated by the enthusiasm with which my poetry-reading tutorials were met during a series of talks to mark Holocaust Memorial Day in Faenza in 2013. Groups of school children, as well as adult members of the general public, appreciated the way in which I explained how poetry analysis offers a new understanding of the Holocaust. The focused study of poetry, and appreciation of its nuanced and revelatory nature, encourages readers to look beyond the surface of a text to the intimate insights contained within. This practice of looking beyond the obvious

teaches empathy, engagement and focus, attributes which are of value in all areas of life.

It is hoped that, through journal publication, the literary approach championed in this thesis will gain traction, and will encourage academic readers to more actively and confidently pursue the study of poetry. The pioneering discussion of online literature is an area which will be of interest to academics and non-academics alike, and which affords the opportunity for collaboration between these groups. Further educational work in schools and public lectures would help to facilitate the focused study of poetry as a valuable means of engaging with the intimate experiences of writers from all walks of life.

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INTRODUCTION

Italy and the Holocaust

At the turn of the twentieth-century, Italy's Jewish communities were historically well integrated into the majority society, and largely secular. Jewish emancipation had begun in Piedmont in 1848 with the Statuto Albertino, which was adopted across the new Kingdom of Italy upon its formation in 1861, and the peninsula's Jews had made vital contributions to the social, political and military life of the country. Indeed, Fabio Levi asserts that '[w]ithout a doubt, we could go as far as to say that Italy was one of the countries in nineteenth-century Europe with the fewest difficulties in minority-majority relations'.² The established assimilation of Italy's Jewish communities rendered Benito Mussolini's sudden imposition of restrictions particularly shocking and distressing to this section of the population which had hitherto been largely composed of loyal and engaged Italian subjects.

The Italian *leggi razziali* came into effect with the *Regio Decreto 17 Novembre 1938, Nr. 1728*, which banned Jews from holding public office and barred them from higher education. Ascribing, like the Nazis in Germany, to the belief that 'true' Italians belonged to an Aryan race which needed protecting from contamination, the racial laws ultimately banned marriage and sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews and severely restricted the rights of the peninsula's Jewish populations. These measures had a profound effect on Italian society, affecting the lives and livelihoods of thousands of people who had considered themselves first and foremost *Italian*, rather than *Jewish*:

Many, who had for years or even decades severed their links with the culture and the world of their origins, found themselves having to sustain an identity – Jews by race – that conflicted with the feelings, behavior, and

² Fabio Levi, 'Anti-Jewish Persecution and Italian Society', in *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi rule, 1922-1945*, ed. by Joshua D. Zimmerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 199-208 (p. 202).

relations they had long been used to enjoying outside the environments of the community.³

Failing to take into account individuals' religious beliefs and political stances, the Jewish label was applied indiscriminately to those fulfilling the racial criteria, precluding those born of Jewish parents from civil life.⁴

Stripped of their rights as citizens, until 1943 'the aim of the Italian Fascist regime [...] was to eliminate Jews from the country, not to eliminate the country's Jews.'⁵ However, this would change following Marshal Badoglio's announcement of an armistice on 8th September 1943, when the country was plunged into internal conflict and uncertainty. Italy as a unified country was, of course, a surprisingly new concept at the time of the Second World War. The Unification of Italy was finalized in 1861, and the country only adopted its modern incarnation after World War One, when Trieste became a part of Italy. For centuries prior to the *Risorgimento* the peninsula had consisted of a number of states, marked by fierce rivalries and each staunchly proud of their independence. This mentality did not dissipate immediately with the unification of Italy, and the double occupation of Italy following the armistice led to a crisis in this newly-forged sense of national feeling.⁶

The signing of the Armistice between the Kingdom of Italy and the Allies marked a key turning point in Italy's wartime history. Germany quickly retaliated to the

³ Levi, 'Anti-Jewish', p.199.

⁴ For a detailed analysis of how Jews were defined under fascism, see Michele Sarfatti's exploration of the 'definizione giuridica di ebreo', in *Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2007), pp. 168-180, particularly pp. 168-173.

⁵ Michele Sarfatti, 'Characteristics and Objectives of the Anti-Jewish Racial Laws in Fascist Italy, 1938-1943', in *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi rule, 1922-1945*, ed. by Zimmerman, pp. 71-80 (p. 76).

⁶ For further information on the *Risorgimento*, see: Lucy Riall, *The Italian Risorgimento: State, Society, and National Unification* (London: Routledge, 1994); Franco Della Peruta, *L'Italia del Risorgimento: problemi, momenti e figure* (Milan: Angeli, 1997); Martin Collier, *Italian Unification: 1820-71* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2003); Alberto Mario Banti, *Il Risorgimento Italiano* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2004); Gilles Pécout, *Il lungo Risorgimento: La nascita dell'Italia Contemporanea (1770-1922)* (Milan: Mondadori, 2011); Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall (eds), *The Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and Carlotta Sorba, *Il melodrama della nazione. Politica e sentimenti nell'età del Risorgimento* (Bari: Laterza, 2015).

Allied disembarkment in southern Italy and invaded from the North. With the double occupation spreading slowly up from Sicily and down from the northern borders, Italy and the Italians were in a state of chaos, with factions forming and neighbours and even family members finding themselves on opposite sides of the political divide. The conflict between fascists and partisans was not the only legacy of the occupation: as soon as the Nazis moved into the peninsula they began detaining and deporting Jews to concentration camps, extending their process of extermination as far south as Rome.⁷ The Allies had been optimistic about the ease with which they would obtain control of 'the soft underbelly of the Axis'.⁸ The reality was, however, quite different, and Allied forces found themselves struggling to break through Nazi defensive lines, which, crucially, held on to Rome until June 1944. This delay afforded the fascists the ongoing ability to deport and persecute the Jews residing in central and northern Italy.

The capital was the worst affected in numerical terms, with over 10% of the Jewish population being arrested. Since deportations took place only in areas occupied by the Germans, over 80% of Italy's Jewish population was able to avoid this fate. After the armistice, 32,307 Jews remained under Nazi control in central and northern Italy. The occupying German forces, supported by Italian fascists, began the process of deporting Jews from Italy soon after 8th September 1943, and the first convoy of Italians, deported from Rome, reached Auschwitz on 23rd October 1943, carrying 1,030 people. Of these first deportees 834 were gassed on arrival, and 196 entered the camps.⁹ Only 16 men and one woman would survive from this first convoy, a survival rate of just 1.6%.¹⁰ The surge in

⁷ For a helpful visual representation of how the Nazi occupation impacted Jewish lives in central and northern Italy, see Alberto Giordano and Anna Holian's images, which depict the scale of the arrests and deportations from across German-occupied Italy, 'Holocaust in Italy', <https://www.ushmm.org/learn/mapping-initiatives/geographies-of-the-holocaust/the-holocaust-in-italy> [accessed 13 March 2018].

⁸ Churchill's words, cited in Philip Morgan, *The Fall of Mussolini: Italy, the Italians, and the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 128.

⁹ Liliana Picciotto Fargion, 'La persecuzione antiebraica in Italia', in *L'Italia nella seconda Guerra mondiale e nella resistenza*, ed. by Francesca Ferratini Tosi, Gaetano Grassi and Massimo Legnani (Milan: Franco Angeli Libri, 1988), pp. 197-214 (p. 211).

¹⁰ Marcello Pezzetti, *Il libro della Shoah italiana: I racconti di chi è sopravvissuto* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009), p. 179.

deportations in the immediate aftermath of the armistice is evident: 1,193 Jews were deported from Italy in October 1943, 1,024 in the November, falling to 837 in December 1943. The vast majority of the Jews deported from Italy were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, with the exception of approximately 400 people who were sent to Bergen-Belsen and less than 100 people who ended up in Flossenbürg, Buchenwald and Ravensbrück.¹¹

Those Italian Jews who survived the torturous train journey across Europe were met with the same fatal process which faced all new arrivals at Auschwitz:¹² first the deportees were divided into men on one side and women and children on the other. Then came the process of selection. Those young and fit enough for harsh manual labour entered the camp; the elderly, pregnant women, mothers with young infants and children were sent straight to the gas chambers.

It was at this point that the new arrivals first glimpsed what lay ahead of them, in the physical form of the prisoners assigned to the *Aufräumungskommando an der Rampe* (the Kommando to maintain order on the platform).¹³ These emaciated figures, often in striped pajamas, must have been a terrifying sight to the newest arrivals, and this moment of horror and perhaps retrospective [self-]recognition features in a huge number of testimonies, as Pier Vincenzo Mangaldo attests: '[esiste] un'impressione registrata da tanti che è piuttosto di stupefatta interrogazione: chi sono queglii in pigiama a righe e berretto che si affaccendano come automi sulla banchina o a frugare dentro i vagoni?'.¹⁴ It would not have been immediately apparent that these figures were a living, breathing illustration of the fate in store for those who entered the camps.

¹¹ Giuseppe Mayda, *Storia della deportazione dall'Italia 1943-1945: Militari, ebrei e politici nei lager del Terzo Reich* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002), p. 86.

¹² Throughout this thesis the word 'Auschwitz' is frequently employed in a metonymical sense to refer to concentration camps and death camps more widely. This usage is common in discussions of the Holocaust, and a famous example can be found in Theodor Adorno's infamous assertion regarding 'poetry after Auschwitz', to be discussed in the following section.

¹³ Pezzetti, p. 178.

¹⁴ Pier Vincenzo Mangaldo, 'La letteratura della Shoah', in *Sterminio e stermini: Shoah e violenze di massa nel Novecento*, ed. by Dimitri D'Andrea and Renata Badii (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010), pp. 273-292 (p. 285).

For those deemed fit for work, there was a stringent process of matriculation before entry into the camp. Prisoners were undressed, shaved, disinfected, assigned a uniform and tattooed.¹⁵ This was the first step in the Nazi process of dehumanization. Dora Klein recalls the tattooing of prisoners: 'qualcuna piangeva, qualcuna gridava, qualcuna cadeva. Non era tanto doloroso, ma era impressionante, era traumatico.'¹⁶ Divested of clothes, hair and name, the tattooing of an identification number, like cattle, had the additional horror of being an affront to the Jewish faith, which forbids tattooing.¹⁷

Prisoners were then assigned to a specific *Kommando*:

sia all'interno di Birkenau, sia nelle officine limitrofe, sia nei vari sottocampi, in alcuni casi in altri campi nazisti. Parte dei prigionieri, tuttavia, non venne mai assegnata all'impiego lavorativo: essi furono costretti a eseguire lavori fasulli e del tutto inutili, che portavano quasi sempre alla morte.¹⁸

The lives of the prisoners were considered disposable, since the ultimate Nazi aim was to eliminate Judaism in its entirety. Prisoners were, therefore, consistently denied adequate food, clothing and sleep, and were worked to exhaustion and, often, death. Settimio Piattelli states 'Nun je 'nteressava niente, nun contavamo niente, per loro dovevamo morí, basta. Soffrire e morire. Basta che eri ebreo, eri finito'.¹⁹ Survival rates of those shipped to the concentration camps from Italy are analogous with deportees from across Europe, and of the 8,566 Jews deported from Italy between 16th September 1943 and 24th February 1945, only 1,009 survived.²⁰

At the end of the war, millions of people, including those few who were liberated from concentration camps or who survived death marches, were without homes, without family or contacts of any kind, without money and without the means to

¹⁵ Pezzetti, p. 225.

¹⁶ Pezzetti, p. 231.

¹⁷ See Leviticus 19.28.

¹⁸ Pezzetti, p. 257.

¹⁹ Pezzetti, p. 299.

²⁰ Mayda, p. 85.

return to their countries of origin. These so called ‘displaced persons’ were often placed in camps awaiting a long, and often arduous, return to the cities from which they had been deported in most cases years earlier. The terminology ‘displaced persons’ or ‘DP’ became significant since, as an umbrella term for all individuals separated from family, friends and home due to the War, it often masked the more shocking experiences of those emerging from the Holocaust, who were not in the first months after liberation termed ‘survivors’ or considered in such terms and who, as a result, often received little acknowledgement of the unique atrocities they had faced.

Survivors describe an initial sense of elation upon returning home to Italy: ‘[e]ravamo euforiche, e soprattutto vive’,²¹ and a relative return to normalcy:

[q]uando scendemmo a Bolzano e ci invitarono a scrivere le nostre generalità su un elenco della Croce Rossa per la prima volta io riscrissi <<Liliana Segre, Milano, corso Magenta 55, nata a Milano il 10 settembre 1930>>. Non ero più il numero 75190 del mio braccio²²

This celebratory mood was often quickly subsumed by the devastating realization that family members had been murdered, homes destroyed or appropriated in their absence, and life would never resemble the comparatively carefree days of the pre-war years.

Alongside the Italian Jews returning to the peninsula, the country’s Jewish population was boosted in the 1940s and 1950s by Jews emigrating from other European countries, where anti-Semitism often continued to thrive after the Second World War. Many of these new arrivals found a new home in Italy, adopting its language and culture and often contributing to the testimonial endeavours of the country’s survivors. One such immigrant is Edith Bruck, who will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 1.

²¹ Liliana Segre’s words, cited in Pezzetti, p. 411.

²² Pezzetti, p. 299.

A rise in Holocaust denial

While the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (CDEC) in Milan and various Jewish Museums across Italy, such as the Museo della comunità Ebraica di Trieste Carlo e Vera Wagner, regularly hold events, create exhibitions and publish articles on the Holocaust, and despite the fact that the events of the *Shoah*, as it is termed in Italy, are taught in schools and, as such, are nominally well-known, there is a worrying and growing trend of Holocaust denial in Italy, which must not be overlooked. The Osservatorio Antisemitismo, which is affiliated with CDEC, compiles a yearly report on developments in [anti-]Jewish sentiment in the peninsula, and states that the web has become a powerful vehicle for denial and discrimination in Italy, observing that ‘se nel 2007 i *web sites* appartenenti a questa categoria erano un quarantina, nel 2013 sono diventati un centinaio e la loro crescita è continua.’²³ A recent study by CDEC found that 8% of respondents stated ‘non so esattamente cosa sia la Shoah’, while 4% asserted ‘è un episodio sopravvalutato, tra l’altro tutto da dimostrare’.²⁴

The rise in misinformation online and Holocaust denial in Italy make a study of poetry after Auschwitz in Italy a pertinent and timely contribution to current research. Italy’s unique wartime and postwar history, as well as its literary and cultural traditions, make a focus on the country’s poetical production by survivors, witnesses, esteemed and renowned artists and the second and third generations, a valuable contribution to a deeper understanding of the past and an appreciation of the ongoing ramifications of the suffering caused by the Nazi extermination programme.

²³ Lettera di informazione – anno I numero 1 – 4 marzo 2014
<http://www.osservatorioantisemitismo.it/approfondimenti/antisemitismo-in-italia-nel-2013/>
[accessed 11 November 2014].

²⁴ *Stereotipi e pregiudizi degli italiani: dagli immigrati agli ebrei*, CDEC
http://osservatorioantisemi-c02.kxcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Opinione_Stereotipi_sintesi.pdf p. 39 [accessed 12 April 2018].

Poetry after Auschwitz: the critical debate

Poetry has, arguably since the very beginnings of human communication, been used to probe and present trauma. There is a rich and well-documented tradition of war poetry, dating back to antiquity, of which Holocaust poetry can be considered an off-shoot. The body of poetry about Auschwitz was born out of the experience of a discreet number of individuals during the Second World War and presents the extremes of human experience during the conflict. However, it inevitably lacks the standard tropes of the war poetry traditionally written by soldiers, such as discussions of honour, patriotism, noble sacrifice,²⁵ focusing instead on the systematic destruction of humanity and the corrosive suffering caused by the Nazi ideology.

The two World Wars have left an indelible mark on Europe, as evinced by the crosses and memorials to be found in almost every village and town in the continent, which stand as testament to the incomprehensible loss of life. The sheer scale of the human involvement on the various fronts in World War One and World War Two, the long periods of indecision, uncertainty and anxiety while orders were awaited and tactics were discussed, and the very sporadic and rudimentary forms of entertainment available to soldiers, made it inevitable that some would turn to writing, and to the composition of poetry about their wartime experiences. In addition to serving as an intellectual pursuit and a diversion to while away the hours, these poems seem to reflect an innate impulse to compose poetry about war and extreme experiences, which has existed in both oral and written form over the millennia.

World War One, and to an event greater extent World War Two, were wars fought on a staggering, unprecedented scale. In the First World War, realities which had seemed ludicrous and far-fetched just a few short months before the

²⁵ Consider, for example, Horace's famous line 'Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori' (*Odes*, III. 2. 13), which World War One poet, Wilfred Owen, calls 'The old Lie' in his own poem, entitled 'Dulce et decorum est', which presents the very inglorious realities of war.

conflict were shortly afterwards enacted with deadly consequences.²⁶ Aerial bombings, gassing and trench warfare exposed the twentieth-century soldier to danger and attack from all directions. The Second World War broke down the traditional barriers between battlefield and the civilian world, with armies destroying towns and lives far from the fighting fronts. Countless lives could be claimed in a single attack, coordinated and managed from afar. The new technologies of modern warfare did not distinguish between soldiers and civilians, men, women and children, and the fear of attack at home changed the public perception of war: it was no longer something which took place in distant, contained locations. One no longer waved off the soldiers and waited for their return from the comfort and safety of one's home – suddenly home was the focal point for aerial bombardments and everyone was a target. There was no chivalry to this new warfare; no code of honour between combatants who were often fighting from afar. Instead, the Second World War brought death and destruction by stealthy means to almost every city in Europe. World War Two has, for this reason, been termed a 'total war'.²⁷ Since many civilians had been directly exposed, to some extent, to the harsh realities of war on an unprecedented scale, the resulting war poetry did not flourish in the same way it had in the First World War, when warfare still remained mysterious to vast swathes of the population.

While a large proportion of society had experienced the horrors of the Second World War first-hand, few had lived through or been fully aware of the Nazi programme of annihilation which had been aimed at Europe's Jews, gypsies, homosexuals and the disabled. With terrifying efficiency and disguised by euphemisms such as the infamous 'Final Solution', millions of individuals were arrested, deported and murdered by the Nazis in what has subsequently been called 'the Holocaust'.²⁸ Poetry written by survivors of this specific and

²⁶ Some of the literature preceding World War One appears distinctly prophetic, especially, for example, Conan Doyle's *Danger* (1914). Many of these literary 'warnings' were, however, ridiculed and dismissed as overblown and unrealistic. See I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: 1763-1984* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 102-5.

²⁷ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 13.

²⁸ This term is not, admittedly, without its controversy, and many take exception to its literal definition of 'burnt offering' which implies (willing) sacrifice and martyrdom. In Italy the most commonly used term is 'Shoah', a Hebrew term which means 'destruction'. This designation is

devastating facet of the Second World War confronted readers with testimonial accounts of events which had been deliberately hidden by the Nazis from the general public, while simultaneously offering survivors a valuable genre for expressing the trauma they had experienced.

As this thesis shall explore, poetry was viewed as an essential tool by both survivors and artists to attempt to reconstruct their lives and society more generally after the Holocaust. Poetry after Auschwitz has, however, traditionally received a difficult and controversial reception, due in part to the belief that the enormity of the Holocaust defies description, that it was unique and therefore ineffable – a position which Gillian Rose has termed ‘Holocaust piety’²⁹ – and also, famously, to Theodor W. Adorno’s infamous assertion that writing poetry after Auschwitz was ‘barbaric’.³⁰ Adorno’s claim had repercussions beyond the critic’s possible comprehension at his time of writing in 1951 and has been repeatedly debated, supported, misconstrued and rejected by scholars, poets and survivors since its publication. Survivor-writer Paul Celan, whose poem ‘Todesfuge’ will be discussed in 0, perceived Adorno’s words as a ‘condemnation of poetry after Auschwitz’,³¹ and he was certainly not alone in interpreting the German critic’s words as a prohibition.

Reacting to this perceived criticism of poetry, there have been voices over the decades challenging Adorno’s claims and championing the genre’s potential for

not without its own complications, since the adoption of a Hebrew term might be said to exclude the non-Jewish victims of the Nazi extermination programme. Due to its widespread dominance in academic writing and the English-speaking world, ‘Holocaust’ has been adopted throughout this thesis to refer to the systematic murder of Jews, gypsies, homosexuals and the disabled under the Nazi regime.

²⁹ Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 43. Rose critiques this stance, suggesting it is both misplaced and detrimental to an engagement with and understanding of the Holocaust. Rose also asserts that Holocaust piety can serve as a distancing technique, adopted to avoid acknowledging humanity’s failings.

³⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Cultural Criticism and Society’, in *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 17-34 (p. 34). The original essay, ‘Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft’ (1951), can be found in *Prismen. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 1976).

³¹ See Dvoretzky Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One Last Genius*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 328. Jerry Glenn’s *Paul Celan* (New York: Twayne, 1973), p. 73, offers further information on Celan’s response to Adorno’s words.

effective and powerful communication of the reality of the camps. Primo Levi was one such challenger, asserting in an interview with Anthony Rudolf: 'after Auschwitz it is barbaric to write poetry except about Auschwitz'.³² Levi considered poetry essential to culture and society in a post-Holocaust world. The survivor-writer's words support Quasimodo's assertion, which will be discussed in Chapter 2, that art and literature and, above all, the poet, have a duty to inform and reform society after Auschwitz.

Jerome Rothenberg, a poet and English translator of Celan's works, presents his own repudiation of Adorno's claim in verse form:

after Auschwitz
there is only poetry no hope
no other language left to heal³³

Rothenberg's claim moves beyond Levi's assertion that poetry *must* engage with Auschwitz, to declare that poetry is the *only* way we can engage with Auschwitz and 'heal', this term again implying the need for poetry to mend and address the ills which led mankind to perpetrate atrocity. Rothenberg's poem essentially brings Adorno's claim full circle. The poet conveys the same negative view of society's failings as the critic, and he uses the poem itself to demonstrate his belief, like Adorno's, that there is 'no meaning after Auschwitz'.³⁴ Rothenberg enacts this post-Holocaust absence of meaning through this disjointed poem, in which he employs repetition, corrections and contradictions to both claim and actively enact the lack of meaning after Auschwitz. In so doing, Rothenberg demonstrates that poetry is uniquely equipped to express the complexities of cultural and societal interactions in the wake of the Nazi atrocity.

A number of survivors, including two survivor-writers discussed in this thesis, Primo Levi and Paul Celan, challenged Adorno, defending and championing the

³² Anthony Rudolf, 'Primo Levi in London (1986)', in *Primo Levi, The Voice of Memory: Interviews 1961-87*, ed. by Marco Belpoliti and Robert Gordon, trans. by Robert Gordon (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 23-33 (p. 28).

³³ Jerome Rothenberg, 'DIBBUKIM (DIBBIKS)', in *Khurbn & Other Poems* (New York: New Directions Books, 1989), pp. 13-14, ll. 55-57.

³⁴ Jerome Rothenberg, 'DIBBUKIM (DIBBIKS)', l. 54.

composition of poetry after Auschwitz. In 1948 another survivor, Robert Antelme, claimed that, unlike prose, poetry does not 'run so great a risk of creating that naked, "objective" testimony, that kind of abstract accusation, that photograph that only frightens us without explicitly teaching anything',³⁵ claiming that poetry is the literary form most suited to stimulating discussion and change in the wake of the Holocaust. Antony Rowland has discussed Adorno's legacy, and points out that:

Antelme's ruminations on his sense that poetry could provide a 'true' representation of the experiences of the camps were published in 1948. A year later, Adorno's more famous declarations about the barbarity and impossibility of post-Holocaust poetry were first encountered. The development of Holocaust poetry and criticism could have been very different if Antelme's comments had become to be regarded as maxims instead of Adorno's polemics.³⁶

Rowland's discussion raises an interesting question: why have critics continued to focus so intently on Adorno's words, almost to the exclusion of other – arguably more qualified – voices, including survivors themselves? Is there still value to privileging Adorno's assertion in discussions of Holocaust writing? In the more than seventy years since the liberation of the camps innumerable poems have been written about Auschwitz by survivors, by celebrated artists and by amateur writers. There is an established corpus of Holocaust poems, and – as this thesis will demonstrate – a strong case to be made for poetry's unique capacity to convey the reality of the camps and to inform readers, remember the dead and encourage readers to engage with the event of the past.

It is no coincidence that this thesis is entitled 'Poetry after Auschwitz': this was a conscious decision to challenge Adorno's claim and demonstrate the continuing presence and value of such works. As Rowland posits: '[i]f Adorno's maxim still haunts post-Holocaust debates about poetry [...] like a form of critical

³⁵ Robert Antelme, 'Poetry and the Testimony of the Camps, Followed by Two Poems by Maurice Honel', in *On Robert Antelme's The Human Race: Essays and Commentary*, ed. by Daniel Dobbels, trans. by Jeffrey Haight (Illinois: The Malboro Press, 2003), pp. 31-6 (p. 33).

³⁶ Antony Rowland and Robert Eaglestone, 'Introduction: Holocaust Poetry', *Critical Survey*, 20:2 (2008), pp. 1-6 (p. 4).

melancholia, perhaps the time has come to break the spell.³⁷ This thesis hopes to demonstrate, through the close analysis of a number of Holocaust poems, that Adorno's words should no longer challenge the legitimacy or propriety of these informative, creative and stimulating poems.

This thesis therefore interprets Adorno's phrase not as a dictum, but as a caution. Rather than expressly prohibiting poetry after Auschwitz, Adorno was calling for a shift in focus away from pre-war established culture to a socially engaged poetry which seeks to rebuild and reshape humanity. These motivations are clearly in evidence in the poetry discussed in this thesis, as later chapters shall explore in more detail. David Miller writes:

Adorno's severely negative theoretical verdicts were never intended as simple descriptive observations, but function principally as an unswerving theoretical rebuke and challenge to all those who would seek to re-establish traditional literary, cultural and hermeneutic categories after the Holocaust as if the process of 'culture' remained somehow unimpaired.³⁸

Put simply, poetry was not the only problem for Adorno. The critic adopted poetry as paradigmatic of the ultimate artistic endeavor. Poetry is used by Adorno to symbolize the products of supposedly civilized societies and cultural institutions, a genre in which reality is aestheticized, polished and primed. Poetry represented the apotheosis of a society which had condoned, supported, and encouraged mass murder, and after Auschwitz he viewed poetry, literature and culture as holding the dangerous potential to whitewash over the past. Adorno's fear is voiced explicitly in *Minima Moralia*:

The claim that Hitler has destroyed German culture is no more than an advertising stunt of those who want to rebuild it from their telephone desks. Such art and thought as were exterminated by Hitler had long been

³⁷ Rowland and Eaglestone, 'Introduction: Holocaust Poetry', p. 5.

³⁸ David Miller, 'After Epic: Adorno's Scream and the Shadows of Lyric', in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Holocaust Literature*, ed. by Jenni Adams (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 65-80 (pp. 67-8).

leading a severed and apocryphal existence, whose last hideouts Fascism swept away.³⁹

For Adorno, the literary establishment had been complicit in Nazism, rather than its victim. He calls for radical change, for literary traditions to be ruptured, in an attempt to inhibit the return of a cultural institution which he viewed as having been a silent partner in the Nazi genocide.

The shadow of Adorno's words looms large over critical writing on Holocaust literature. The belief that the critic sought to prevent the composition of poetry after Auschwitz has led to a significant portion of the majority of works on Holocaust literature dedicating a space to rebutting his assertion and justifying the presence of Holocaust literature, and the value of its study. Antony Rowland discusses the legacy of Adorno's words, and argues that they led to poetry 'composed with the self-conscious and self-castigatory strategies of awkward poetics',⁴⁰ citing Celan as one of the writers who took the critic's words to heart and sought to create a challenging and at times obscure modernist poetry in response to Adorno's claim. Discussing the long-term impact of Adorno's work, Rowland cites the example of James Hatley's *Suffering Witness: the Quandary of Responsibility after the Irreparable*, in which Hatley claims that Holocaust literature 'must involve a continuing discourse about the inadequacy of that writing'.⁴¹ Rowland responds:

Perhaps it is the moment to argue for a cessation of such discourse about inadequacy or, at least, to accept it as taken for granted. Critical work could then begin on writing that goes beyond the paradigms of vexed aesthetics.⁴²

This is precisely what this thesis aims to do: not to ignore Adorno and his impact and legacy, but to understand his words not as a prohibition, but an aspiration to

³⁹ T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. by E. R. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), p. 57.

⁴⁰ Antony Rowland, *Poetry as Testimony: Witnessing and Memory in Twentieth-century Poems* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), p. 8.

⁴¹ James Hatley, *Suffering Witness: the Quandary of Responsibility after the Irreparable* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 109.

⁴² Antony Rowland, *Poetry as Testimony*, p. 9.

move away from the structures of the past: the structures appropriated by Nazism. It is hoped that the works presented in this thesis will speak for themselves in terms of demonstrating that poetry aspires towards reforming and rebuilding mankind on both an individual and societal level, by demanding active engagement from the reader to a greater extent than other forms of writing.

While this thesis strives to move beyond Adorno and focus on the poems themselves rather than the polemics surrounding them, in many ways this work is structured in such a way as to be intimately linked with Adorno's hopes and fears for poetry, literature and culture after Auschwitz. The thesis begins by providing a space for the voices of the very individuals Nazism sought to destroy, before moving on to discuss the works of two artists who seek to *rifare l'uomo*.⁴³ voicing and enacting their commitment to rebuilding society, rather than perpetuating the social behaviours which had led to the Lager. By focusing also on the less-often studied topics of translation poems and online poetry, this thesis also engages with the work of writers who continue to be critically marginalized. The inclusive nature of this thesis makes it not only a valuable new addition to the field of Holocaust studies and modern Italian literature, but also a work which goes some way to addressing Adorno's fears that culture would perpetuate the destructive dogmas of the past. By providing a space for different voices, this work constitutes a profound rebuttal of Nazism's destructive and silencing aims.

An argument for close reading

This thesis is structured in such a way as to introduce the reader to a range of different poetries about the Holocaust: survivor-poetry, lyrical poetry, the *canzone d'autore*, translated poetry and online poetry, in order to discuss how each form contributes to our understanding of the events of the Nazi atrocity and the poets' motivations behind their works, before proceeding with an in-

⁴³ Quasimodo's term, which is fully explored in chapter two, demonstrates his adherence to the humanist tradition, and belief in mankind's responsibility to positively rebuild society after Auschwitz.

depth analysis of a number of examples of each poetical form. This sustained close analysis distinguishes this thesis from other writing on Holocaust poetry, since it transforms the work from an overview of the field, or an anthology of poetry, into a wide-ranging assessment of the ways in which the poems function to engage and inform the reader about Auschwitz. While existing literature variously demonstrates that such works *exist* and that they may *perform a function*, this thesis presents the reader with a clear, demonstrable, worked-through examination of *how* this function is fulfilled and *how* effects are created.

This close, analytical reading is based loosely upon I. A. Richards' 'Practical Criticism' approach, which grew out of the belief that '[i]t is *not* inevitable, or in the nature of things, that poetry should seem such a remote, mysterious, unmanageable thing to so large a majority of readers.'⁴⁴ Richards, a professor of English at Cambridge University in the 1920s, had noticed a widespread inability amongst his students to engage critically with poetry and he therefore used his lectures to create an experiment, presenting his attendees with a wide variety of anonymized poems and asking them to read and reread the works carefully before writing about their impressions. Richards identified a number of failings in his students' approach to and readings of poetry, including reliance on stock responses, adherence to doctrine, and outright miscomprehension in a number of cases. As the study of literature at university level was still in its infancy at Cambridge University at Richards' time of teaching, he wished to shape the way that textual analysis was taught, and he championed a structured, critical approach to reading poetry which aims to dispense with preconceptions and focus exclusively on the words on the page.

Richards established his school of thought with two complementary works, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) in which he advocates the close reading of texts and outlined a methodology; and *Practical Criticism* (1929) in which he 'makes the case overwhelmingly, through its many examples of readings gone

⁴⁴ I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 309.

wrong, that a new method of reading poetry more carefully – one that attends very closely to the meaning of the words on the page – is necessary.⁴⁵ Richards' works, along with his student William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), were fundamental texts to the development of the New Criticism movement, which championed the centrality of the text on the page, to the exclusion of author biography and context.

A number of literature professors have recreated Richards' practical criticism experiment in the decades since the 1920s, almost all of whom report yielding very similar results, and the same failings in their students' approach to poetry. Kenneth C. Bennett observed the responses of four classes of students over four years in the 1970s, writing:

Overall, the study showed that the very same problems, the same obstacles to sane critical thinking that Richards revealed, persist despite the reforms in the teaching of English that have occurred since 1929. [...]

I would argue that for students, experiencing Richards' method is more important than simply reading him, however valuable that is, and that both students and teachers can learn much not only about criticism but about poetry, aesthetic values, and even themselves through this essentially simple but very effective technique.⁴⁶

Yet, despite continued evidence in support of the need to foster and encourage textual analysis skills among students, practical criticism 'has now become a dirty term in English studies',⁴⁷ and the text-based approach of the New Critics has been accused of being sterile and ahistorical, and failing to take into account essential information which, though exterior to the text, is fundamental to both its creation and subsequent interpretation.

Richards stressed the importance of removing author details and date from the poems he circulated to his students, wishing in this way to avoid influencing the readers' reactions to the poem:

⁴⁵ Donald J. Childs, *The Birth of New Criticism: Conflict and Conciliation in the Early Work of William Empson, I. A. Richards, Robert Graves, and Laura Riding* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2013), p. 285.

⁴⁶ Kenneth C. Bennett, 'Practical Criticism Revisited', *College English*, 38:6 (Feb., 1977), 567-579, (p. 578).

⁴⁷ Gerald Hammond, 'Don's Delight', *Guardian Higher Education*, 22 Sept. 1998, p. v.

There cannot be much doubt that when we know we are reading Milton or Shelley, a great deal of our approval and admiration is being accorded not to the poetry but to an idol. Conversely, if we did not know that we were reading Ella Wheeler Wilcox, much of our amusement or patronizing condescension might easily be absent. Far more than we like to admit, we take a hint for our response from the poet's reputation. Whether we assent or dissent, the traditional view runs through our response like the wire upon which a climbing plant is trained.⁴⁸

Richards' insistence on the anonymity of the poems he presented to his readers was to force his students to engage with what was physically on the page before them, without the preconceptions he outlines above. Richards was writing in the decades preceding the famous critical debate on the figure of the author. Works such as Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author' (1968), Michel Foucault's 'What is an Author?' (1969) and William K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's 'The Intentional Fallacy' (1946) all challenged the centrality of the author in literary discussions. Roland Barthes, in his aforementioned essay claimed that '[w]riting is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. [It is] the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.'⁴⁹ Foucault, in line with Richards' practices, disapproved of the relentless focus on an author's biography, asserting:

literary discourses came to be accepted only when endowed with the author function. We now ask of each poetic or fictional text: From where does it come, who wrote it, when, under what circumstances, or beginning with what design? The meaning ascribed to it and the status or value accorded it depend on the manner in which we answer these questions.⁵⁰

Foucault's concern was that reading with an emphasis on author biography could be reductive, a fear which runs through Richards' own experiment in *Practical Criticism*. The critical movement to strike the author from discussions of literature in the mid twentieth-century was valuable in terms of encouraging

⁴⁸ I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, pp. 315-6.

⁴⁹ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-8 (p. 142).

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', in *The Essential Works of Foucault: 1954-1984*, ed. by James D. Faubion, trans. by Robert Hurley and Others, 3 vols (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1998), II, 205-22 (p. 213).

readers to focus on *what* is written, rather than *who* wrote it; however it is evident that '[i]f a poem matters, so too does the life that created it.'⁵¹ Poetry about Auschwitz is poetry which deals with the lives and experiences of real people who suffered in a real human tragedy, and whether writing from direct experience, or in artistic solidarity, this poetry must be read with some appreciation of the specific authors and their circumstances.

This thesis does retain some of the essence of Richards' universal approach, however, in the way that it presents works from across the authorial spectrum, from 'high' lyric poetry to songs from popular culture, as well as the work of traditionally invisible translators and a relatively unknown online poet, without focusing unduly on the reputation of the writers included. While traditional criticism might exclude various of these figures, especially the latter, due to notions of unsuitability, and a lack of a common, established, critical consensus regarding the quality of their poetry, this thesis engages with the works directly, allowing the poetry to speak for itself.

Linked to the ahistoricity of the practical criticism approach, subsequent critics have also found fault with the naïve claim that engagement with a text can be scientific or truly objective. 'Richards believed that he had found a technique for achieving absolutely undistorted communication [in which r]eader and text can be brought into a perfect, stable, isomorphic relation',⁵² a laudable but over-optimistic aim, as demonstrated by the continued failings among readers of poetry to engage critically with the works, despite decades of teaching based on practical criticism in schools and universities in the 90 years since Richards published his work.

Not only did Richards and the New Critics fail to take into consideration the figure of the writer, they also ignored the presence of the reader, a figure which Louise M. Rosenblatt seeks to bring into literary discussion:

⁵¹ John Lennard, *The Poetry Handbook*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 323.

⁵² Isobel Armstrong, 'Textual Harassment: The Ideology of Close Reading, or How Close is Close?', *Textual Practice*, 9:3, 401-420, (p. 404).

One can understand and appreciate the great interest in textual analysis in recent years, since the author has selected these words and no others as the cues that will guide the reader's performance. Perhaps because of the preoccupation with the tie between the author and his creation, or the fixation on the text itself, there has been resistance to, and suspicion of, the idea of the reader's creativity. Yet we must remember that once the creative activity of the author has ended, what remains for others – for even the author himself – is a text. To again bring a poem into being requires always a reader⁵³

The reader is essential to Holocaust poems, given their imperative to inform and engage audiences and memorialise those who died in the camps. The reader is also essential to the analysis of poems in this thesis, since despite efforts to ensure that comments on the texts are based on demonstrable elements of the text, every reading of a literary work is unavoidably a personal reading.

In order to ensure the analyses of the poems in this thesis are as valuable to other readers as possible, the focus has been – in line with the approach Richards championed – on providing a close and detailed analysis of the words on the page with, however, discussion of the writers' biographies, styles and personal motivations for addressing the Holocaust in their work. No reading of Holocaust poetry should be ahistorical, since the events of the Second World War are fundamental to the very creation of these works. The analysis of the poems discussed in this thesis uses Richards' promoted focus on the text, specifically the metre, form, layout, punctuation, lineation, rhyme, diction, syntax, as well as the history and biography of the poems.⁵⁴ Looking closely at the poems in this way ensures that sweeping generalisations about the works are avoided, and comments are anchored and supported with evidence and examples from the texts themselves.

This focus on the complex web of details which work in unison to create each poem allows us to explore the potential intentions of the writer, the effects

⁵³ Louise M. Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*, paperback edn (Southern Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), p. 15.

⁵⁴ This list is derived from the chapter headings of John Lennard's *The Poetry Handbook*, a comprehensive work which provides an invaluable introduction to the practice of critically engaging with poetry, and one which was fundamental to my own development as a reader of poetry.

demonstrably created and the responses such details elicit in the reader/listener. The aim has been to elucidate and demonstrate, to allow the qualities of the writing to emerge for the reader. With this aim in mind, each chapter is organized in such a way as to introduce the given area(s) of poetry, to discuss the sub-genres' place and role in the corpus of poetry after Auschwitz, and finally to demonstrate through analysis how the various poems engage with the Holocaust, variously engaging, informing, aspiring to stimulate change and memorializing the dead.

Literature review

Holocaust Studies has flourished as an academic discipline since the late 1990s, both in Italy and around the world. Despite clear academic interest, however, scholarly literature on the Holocaust has tended to focus on Germany and the United States, with relatively little work on the specific Italian context.⁵⁵ R. S. C. Gordon's *The Holocaust in Italian Culture: 1944-2010* is a rare exception, offering a rigorous exploration of how the Holocaust has spread through Italian culture from the liberation of the camps to the present day.⁵⁶ The first survey of its kind, Gordon's book explores the complex and unique ways in which Italy has responded to the Holocaust, which, as this thesis posits, makes an Italian perspective on poetry after Auschwitz a particularly pertinent area of study.

A recent addition to the field of Holocaust literary studies, Jenni Adams' *The Bloomsbury Companion to Holocaust Literature* collects scholarly essays by leading researchers, and covers a wide range of topics, including language, testimony and poetry. Other established works on literature include Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi's *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature*, which explores the creative literature which has been born out of Auschwitz, and the uniqueness

⁵⁵ Notable exceptions include the Italian language works Fabio Levi, *Dodici lezioni sugli ebrei in Europa. Dall'emancipazione alle soglie dello sterminio* (Turin: Zamorani, 2003); Michele Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2007); Valeria M. M. Traversi (ed.), *Farfalle di spine: Poesie sulla Shoah* (Bari: Palomar, 2009); Fabio Levi, *La persecuzione antiebraica. Dal fascismo al dopoguerra* (Turin: Zamorani, 2009) and Marcello Flores (ed.), *Storia della Shoah in Italian* vols. I-II (Turin: UTET, 2010).

⁵⁶ Robert S. C. Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture, 1944-2010* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012).

of this merging of art and experience;⁵⁷ and Alvin Rosenfeld's *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature*, which takes a broad approach to 'literature', incorporating a number of genres, such as novels and poetry, which tend to receive less attention in academic discussions of Holocaust literature.⁵⁸ A number of other seminal works stand out, including James E. Young's *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narratives and the Consequences of Interpretation*;⁵⁹ Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*;⁶⁰ Inga Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust*;⁶¹ Elie Wiesel, 'The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration';⁶² Andrew Leak and George Paizis, *The Holocaust and the Text: Speaking the Unspeakable*;⁶³ Risa Sodi, *Narrative and Imperative: The First Fifty Years of Italian Holocaust Writing (1944-1994)*;⁶⁴ Sue Vice, 'Holocaust Poetry and Testimony';⁶⁵ and Zoë Vania Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation*.⁶⁶

⁵⁷ Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁵⁸ Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

⁵⁹ James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narratives and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

⁶⁰ Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

⁶¹ Inga Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁶² Elie Wiesel, 'The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration', in *Dimensions of the Holocaust: Lectures at Northwestern University*, 2nd ed. (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996), pp. 5-19.

⁶³ Andrew Leak and George Paizis (eds), *The Holocaust and the Text: Speaking the Unspeakable* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

⁶⁴ Risa Sodi, *Narrative and Imperative: The First Fifty Years of Italian Holocaust Writing (1944-1994)* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

⁶⁵ Sue Vice, 'Holocaust Poetry and Testimony', *Critical Survey*, 20:2 (2008), 7-17.

⁶⁶ Zoë Vania Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

While anthologies of war poetry proliferate, there are still remarkably few collections of poems about Auschwitz, and Hilda Schiff's *Holocaust Poetry*, which gathers together many of the most iconic poems about Auschwitz, continues to be a reference point for scholars.⁶⁷ A similar, Italian anthology of poems about the Holocaust, *Farfalle di spine. Poesia sulla Shoah*, edited by Valeria M. M. Traversi,⁶⁸ presents works from Italian writers, including Primo Levi, as well as translations of authors such as Paul Celan, and even includes Francesco Guccini's 'Auschwitz', a *canzone d'autore* which will be discussed in chapter 2. Traversi presents the poems in three sections: I. I testimoni diretti; II. I testimoni indiretti. Voci fuori dal filo spinato; and III. Voci di poeti sulla Shoah. 1942-2007. The first section is by far the most vast, and it is interesting that Traversi places Celan in the second category, as an 'indirect witness'. Also of significance is the fact that Guccini is included in the final section of 'poets' without qualifying his precise profession as a *cantautore*. Chapter 2 will discuss this distinction (or lack thereof) in greater detail. Traversi's work gathers together a wide and interesting range of poetical texts, including many works from outside Italy, and she offers brief notes on a number of poems, including Celan's 'Fuga di morte'.

Since each of the chapters in this thesis discusses distinct types of poetry which have not traditionally been considered in tandem, much of the available literature has been pertinent to one chapter but not to others, with the exception of the overviews and anthologies outlined above. For this reason, the key texts per chapter will now briefly be outlined below.

Antony Rowland's work, in particular his monograph *Poetry as Testimony: Witnessing and Memories in Twentieth-century Poems*, contributes much to our understanding of how poetry functions as testimony, and Rowland interacts directly with Primo Levi's poetry in a number of his works, seeking to readdress, as this thesis does, the current critical imbalance which tends to exclude Levi's

⁶⁷ Hilda Schiff (ed.), *Holocaust Poetry* (London: Fount, 1995).

⁶⁸ *Farfalle di spine*, ed. by Traversi.

poetry from discussions of the survivor's oeuvre. *Poetry as Testimony* looks exclusively at survivor writing, exploring a range of traumatic events including the Holocaust and the terrorist attack of 9/11 and the poetical outpourings such events stimulated.

On the *canzone d'autore*, Michele Antonellini's *Non solo canzonette*,⁶⁹ and the multi-authored work *Il suono e l'inchiostro*,⁷⁰ have much to offer the reader on this uniquely-Italian genre, and its close links with literature and poetry, although this thesis is the first to conduct a comparative analysis between examples of the *canzone d'autore* and lyric poetry.

There is a substantial body of literature on translation, some of which has taken on canonical status, including Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility*⁷¹ and Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'.⁷² One of the most prolific contemporary translation scholars, Jean Boase-Beier, has written a number of highly pertinent works, including *Translating the Poetry of the Holocaust*,⁷³ and 'Holocaust Poetry and Translation'.⁷⁴ Boase-Beier has also translated Paul Celan's poetry, including 'Todesfuge', into English, and discusses the challenges his work presents the translator in the aforementioned works.

On Celan himself, John Felstiner's celebrated work, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*,⁷⁵ offers an invaluable biography of the survivor-writer, written from the perspective of a key English translator of Celan's work. Diletta D'Eredità has written a number of articles, and indeed her MA thesis, on the reception of Paul

⁶⁹ Michele Antonellini, *Non solo canzonette: Temi e protagonisti della canzone d'autore italiana* (Foggia: Bastogi, 2002).

⁷⁰ Centro Studi Fabrizio De André, *Il suono e l'inchiostro: Cantautori, saggi, poeti a confronto* (Milan: Chiarelettere, 2009).

⁷¹ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2nd edn, (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁷² Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', trans. by Harry Zohn, in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 71-82 (pp. 79-80).

⁷³ Jean Boase-Beier, *Translating the Poetry of the Holocaust* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁷⁴ Jean Boase-Beier, 'Holocaust Poetry and Translation', in *Translating Holocaust Lives*, ed. by Peter Davies, Andrea Hammel and Marion Winters (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 149-166.

⁷⁵ John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995).

Celan in Italy, including an exploration of the Italian translations of his poetry. The volume *Paul Celan in Italia*, of which she is co-editor, offers a rigorous and wide-ranging exploration of Celan's legacy in the peninsula.⁷⁶

A core group of scholars have contributed to the growing literature on digital poetry, by definition an emerging topic. In 2013 Ray Siemens' and Susan Schreibman's edited volume, *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies* was published, featuring an invaluable contribution from Christopher Funkhouser on digital poetry.⁷⁷ Funkhouser has also authored *New Directions in Digital Poetry*,⁷⁸ and his work discusses not only the novel possibilities afforded by poetry on the internet, but also the potential technical difficulties of accessing online materials, for which there is, at present, no solution.

Building upon this wealth of existing literature, this thesis takes a new direction, combining the three aforementioned categories: the historical, the literary overview and the anthology, and bringing together different types of poetry to present a wide-ranging critical engagement with Italian Holocaust poetry in all its various manifestations, which outlines historical developments and the evolution of poetical forms, as well as offering a unique close analysis of the poems themselves, to build a full and valuable picture of poetry after Auschwitz in Italy.

Chapter outline

This thesis demonstrates that poetry is central to artists' engagement with the Holocaust, and their aspirations to recast and rebuild society after Auschwitz. The wide-ranging survey of poetry (or, more accurately, *poetries*) presented in this work will explore the ways in which poetry facilitates an engagement with the past by offering an analysis of the works of artists, survivors and second and

⁷⁶ *Paul Celan in Italia: Un percorso tra ricerca, arti e media 2007-2014*, ed. by Diletta D'Eredità, Camilla Miglio and Francesca Zimarri (Rome: Sapienza Università Editrice, 2015).

⁷⁷ Christopher Funkhouser, 'Digital Poetry: A Look at Generative, Visual, and Interconnected Possibilities in its First Four Decades', in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, ed. by Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (Oxford: Wiley, 2013) pp. 318-335.

⁷⁸ C. T. Funkhouser, *New Directions in Digital Poetry* (New York: Continuum, 2012).

third generation individuals. Poetry about Auschwitz has grown, over the last seven decades, into an abundant body of works, consisting of widely different poetries composed by vastly different people from around the world. This thesis seeks to present a cross-section of this corpus, to ask how and why these varied writers and writings converge on Auschwitz, with what motivations, and with what effects. This thesis will explore *how* a wide range of individuals from across the artistic spectrum have written poetry about Auschwitz, after Auschwitz.

Some of the forms of poetry examined in this thesis, such as the *canzone d'autore*, are uniquely Italian; others are Italian examples of universal trends, such as survivor-writing. The driving force behind this thesis has been the desire to engage with, explore and showcase Italian poetical responses to the Holocaust, in all their various permutations, and the belief that reading and analyzing this body of literature offers new insights into the events of the past, and both the encouragement and material needed to ensure the horrors of the past are not forgotten.

Arranged in a roughly chronological order, the thesis begins with a chapter on two survivor-writers, who have composed both poetry and prose in Italian about their Holocaust experiences. Entitled 'The Role of Poetry in the post-Holocaust Rehabilitation of Primo Levi and Edith Bruck', Chapter 1 offers a counter-point of two very different writers and addresses notions of one's mother tongue, age and upbringing. The chapter explores how the poetry written by both Levi and Bruck about the Holocaust adheres to a pattern demonstrated by a wide range of other survivor-writers, and discerns three key and often distinct writing motivations: writing to remember, writing for catharsis, and writing to inform and educate.

Both Levi and Bruck refer directly to the power they feel poetry possesses to communicate the trauma of survivorship in a uniquely expressive way, and the in-depth analysis of seven poems by the authors offers clear and demonstrable evidence of the genre's ability to convey intimate experiences in nuanced ways

and ultimately to assist in the rehabilitation of these two survivors into life after Auschwitz.

Chapter two continues with the theme of rehabilitation, moving from the individual survivor's own self-renewal, to art's aspiration to reconstruct society and mankind after the Holocaust. In this chapter, '*Rifare l'Uomo After Auschwitz: Salvatore Quasimodo and Francesco Guccini*', we explore the works of two renowned writers, incorporating a quote by Quasimodo in the chapter title as emblematic of art's perceived duty in the late 1940s and beyond. Quasimodo and Guccini offer a fascinating comparative study, appertaining as they do to two quite different poetical genres: lyrical poetry and the *canzone d'autore* respectively. The chapter calls for renewed literary attention to song, and introduces the discussion of extra-textual elements, a focus which will return in the final chapter on web-based poetry.

Quasimodo and Guccini, this chapter demonstrates, both benefit from a wide readership/audience and a solid platform from which to present their socially-engaged works on the Holocaust. Both men turn to the atrocity: Quasimodo almost immediately after the liberation of the camps, and Guccini in the late-1960s, a delay which is inevitable, given his young age at the end of World War Two. The writers both acknowledge and attempt to fulfil what they consider to be art's duty after the Holocaust to educate and engage society.

Chapter three continues with an exploration of the role of art in society's moral development and growth after Auschwitz, with an examination and comparative analysis of four Italian translations of Paul Celan's 'Todesfuge'. Building upon topics discussed in chapters one and two, the third chapter of the thesis explores the iconic poem by one of the world's most famous survivor-writers, the significance of Celan's decision to resolutely continue to write in German, and the difficulties inherent in translating a poem which is not only a piece of art, but a piece of testimony. The chapter engages with the four published Italian translations of Celan's poem, which span over six decades, offering a fascinating study of how the public reception of 'Todesfuge' has shifted over this timeframe.

The chapter's focus gradually moves from a discussion of translation, and the perception of the translator in modern culture and scholarly writing, before homing in on the unique demands and issues associated with poetry translations and focusing further on translating Celan and the complexities of his work, before addressing the translations directly by centering on five core translation cruxes. These translation cruxes, as the chapter explains, are sections of the poem which present the greatest difficulties and challenges to the translator. These cruxes can be discerned by the difference between translations, and demonstrate and elucidate the different translators' varying approaches, emphases and styles. These sections are of interest because they are the parts of the poem which demand the most engagement from the translator/reader and arguably offer the most fascinating insights into the poem and multiple interpretations of the survivor-writer's original work.

The final chapter is the most unique element of the thesis, and introduces the concept of 'online poetry', as opposed to the more commonly discussed 'digital poetry' which dominates the current, though scant, critical work on internet poetry. Online poetry, the chapter explains, is poetry which takes advantage of the extra-textual elements the internet offers (images, music etc.) but is not necessarily or essentially digitally native. Focusing on an Italian host site of poetry, www.scrivere.info, the chapter assesses the work of a specific contributor, Giorgia Spurio, who has written a number of poems about Auschwitz. One of the unique features of online poetry is the comments function, which permits other users to publicly interact with the poem and thereby allows us to assess and measure a given poem's reception and impact. The phenomenon of online poetry about the Holocaust demonstrates the ongoing perception of art's social debt, in a time when the internet allows for greater dissemination, democratization and access to a wider range of information. Poets such as Spurio represent a new generation of writers using a new medium to share their works and interact with others, ensuring that the Holocaust past is not forgotten.

Together the chapters offer a wide-ranging overview of poetry about the Holocaust, written in Italian, in all its various forms. The thesis demonstrates the

importance of these works in informing our understanding of the past and the vitality of the genre and its expressive capacity to perform multiple simultaneous functions, such as memorializing the dead and calling for change for the future.

Chapter 1 THE ROLE OF POETRY IN THE POST-HOLOCAUST REHABILITATION OF PRIMO LEVI AND EDITH BRUCK

1.1 Introduction

The introduction to this thesis outlined the driving intention of this work as a desire to engage, showcase and analyse Italian poetical responses to the Holocaust in their various permutations. This exploration of poetry about Auschwitz will begin by examining the role of poetry in the post-Holocaust rehabilitation of two survivors who witnessed the atrocity of the camps first-hand: Primo Levi and Edith Bruck.

Essential to each category of writer discussed in this thesis: survivors, lyric poets and *cantautori* (Salvatore Quasimodo and Francesco Guccini in Chapter 2), translator poets (Gilda Musa, Moshe Kahn, Marcello Bagnasco, Giuseppe Bevilacqua and Dario Borso in 0) and digital poets (Giorgia Spurio in Chapter 4), is an exploration of their motives and their intended audiences. Why did they write? Specifically, for the purpose of this thesis, why did they write *about the Holocaust*? And, for whom did they write?

Chapter 2 will use Quasimodo's own ambitious, perhaps grandiose, phrase 'rifare l'uomo' as a means of understanding the artistic world's post-Auschwitz imperative, while chapters 3 and 4 will explore how translators and young contemporary writers continue to be drawn to and engage with the Holocaust in their work. For the survivors emerging from the Nazi camps, however, we can assume the motivations to write were more pressing and more personal. And yet, the composition of poetry may not necessarily seem an intuitive or even immediately comprehensible response to survivorship. What is the link between poetry and trauma? Why did survivors write poems about, and in response to, their extreme suffering? These questions cannot be answered in general terms, on behalf of all survivors, since each individual's experience and suffering in the camps was unique, as was their means of processing (or not) their trauma and adapting to life after the horrors of the Nazi genocide. Since a blanket approach

is not advisable or helpful here, we will turn to the two survivor-writers discussed in this chapter: Primo Levi and Edith Bruck, and look in detail at their pre- and postwar circumstances, motivations, and their decision to write poetry about Auschwitz.

1.2 Primo Levi and Edith Bruck

This chapter, as outlined above, will examine survivor-writing. Specifically, the role of poetry in post-Holocaust survivorship. I have elected to study the poetical works of two Holocaust survivors, both of whom write extensively in Italian about their experiences in the Nazi camps, and who, when studied together, offer the potential for a particularly rich comparative study. Primo Levi and Edith Bruck differ from one another in a number of ways, including gender, age, nationality and mother tongue. A biographical introduction to these two survivor-writers will elucidate the features which make Levi and Bruck an ideal pairing for a comparative study.

Primo Levi¹ was born in Turin on 31st July 1919 at Corso Re Umberto 75, the same building in which he would spend his entire life, aside from his incarceration during the Holocaust, and in which he would die in 1987 from a fall down the stairwell. Levi's upbringing was liberal and middle-class and he excelled at school and university where, despite the racial laws, he graduated from the University of Turin in 1941 with a degree in chemistry. In 1943 he joined the Resistance (affiliated with the group *Giustizia e Libertà*), but was captured almost immediately. After confessing to being a Jew – believing it would grant him a more favourable outcome than admitting to being a partisan, as he explains in

¹ There is an incredibly extensive amount of scholarship on Primo Levi, and I would direct the reader to the bibliography for a fuller listing. I shall, for the sake of brevity, list here the seminal works on Levi: Mirna Cicioni, *Primo Levi: Bridges of Knowledge* (Oxford: Berg, 1995); Marco Belpoliti, *Primo Levi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998); Robert S. C. Gordon, *Primo Levi's Ordinary Virtues: From Testimony to Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Ian Thomson, *Primo Levi* (London: Vintage, 2003) and, of course, Levi's own autobiographical account of his Auschwitz period, *Se questo è un uomo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005).

*Se questo è un uomo*² – he was imprisoned at Fossoli and later deported to Auschwitz on 21st February 1944.

Upon arrival at the Nazi camp he was assigned to work in Monowitz, where prisoners were used as slave labour to produce synthetic rubber for IG Farben. His working knowledge of German and chemistry degree undoubtedly contributed to his survival, since they afforded him the comparatively privileged opportunity, for some months, to work indoors.

Suffering with scarlet fever, and confined to the camp's sanatorium, Levi was left behind to die when the Nazis forced the remaining prisoners on a death march on 18th January 1945, during the closing moments of the war. Along with a handful of other inmates, Levi managed to survive until the liberation of the camp by the Red Army a few days later. His return to Turin was by no means straightforward, however, and he only reached the city again some nine months later.³

Levi began to compose poems and his *magnum opus*, *Se questo è un uomo*, almost as soon as he had returned home, although the text was rejected by major local publisher Einaudi (with Natalia Ginzburg and Cesare Pavese making this now infamous decision). The book was published instead by a smaller publishing house, De Silva. It was only in 1955 that Einaudi revised its position on Levi's work, and published the text in 1958, upon which it became a significant success. As a result of the recognition *Se questo è un uomo* garnered, Levi began to compose further prose works alongside his work as an industrial chemist. It is essential to note that even in the interim years between 1947 and 1955, when Levi's prose writing had hit a lull, he continued to compose poetry.⁴

The 1960s saw Levi's profile explode on the national scene, with the publication of his second book, *La tregua* in 1963. He also began to talk about his Auschwitz

² Levi, *Se questo, p. 11.*

³ Levi describes this epic cross-European odyssey in *La tregua* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997).

⁴ See, for example, 'Attesa' (2nd January 1949), 'Epigrafe' (6th October 1952), 'Il canto del corvo (II)' (22nd August 1953), in *Ad ora incerta* (Milan: Garzanti, 2009), p. 29, p. 30 and p. 31 respectively).

experiences in interviews and at schools as the public began to show increasing interest in the events of the Holocaust, and a desire to know more from survivors. Levi continued to publish in the following decades, branching out into science fiction, chemistry-inspired fiction, essays and translations, and reached the peak of his international acclaim in the 1980s, with numerous interviews, talks and lectures around Italy and beyond.

In 1986 Levi made a monumental return to the topic of Auschwitz in his writing, with the publication of *I sommersi e i salvati*,⁵ the title of which is taken from a chapter title in *Se questo è un uomo*. This work grappled with intense themes such as memory, guilt and the 'grey zone'. At this time Levi, who had suffered with intermittent depression for much of his life, began to express increasing anxiety and despair at the growth of Holocaust denial and the apparent indifference of younger generations to the Auschwitz past.⁶ On 11th April 1987 Primo Levi committed suicide, falling down the stairwell of the apartment in which he had been born and where he had lived almost all of his life.

Levi's life and work has met with considerable scholarly interest, indeed '[f]or many, he has become *the* witness-writer par excellence'.⁷ *La tregua* and *Se questo è un uomo* were both adopted as key texts in schools in Italy within Levi's lifetime, and his direct, sparing writing style have garnered admiration on an international level. Levi's prose works, especially those of an autobiographical nature, were essential to his meteoric rise to international fame in the 1980s. His poetry, which will be the focus of this chapter, has failed to attract the same critical or public attention. This comparative lack of interest in Levi's poetical output is perhaps both a cause and a symptom of Einaudi's decision not to publish Levi's poetry collection, *Ad ora incerta* as a standalone volume, in contrast to its treatment of the majority of Levi's texts, which have been

⁵ Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati* (Turin: Einaudi, 2007).

⁶ Recalled by Edith Bruck, in a private interview in August 2010.

⁷ Robert S. C. Gordon, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi*, ed. by Robert S. C. Gordon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), xvii- xxi (xvii).

published individually as well as in the Biblioteca dell'Orsa three volume collection of his works.

Another significant feature of Einaudi's treatment of Levi's poetry is the editorial decision to place his poems in volume II of the *Opere*, which bears the subtitle 'Romanzi e poesie'. Einaudi's election to combine Levi's poetry with his fiction inevitably suggests that there is a correspondence between the two forms, and that they together offer an alternative side to Levi's writing, in distinct contrast to the exclusively autobiographical prose works which form volume I of the *Opere*. An explicit, and perhaps self-perpetuating, distinction is therefore made between Levi's more successful non-fiction works, and his relatively obscure fiction and poetry. This blurring of fiction and poetry fails to take into account the way in which Levi used poetry – as shall be explored in detail in this chapter – to inform the reader about the Holocaust, to memorialise lost friends, and as an active means of rehabilitation in his post-Auschwitz life.

Edith Bruck, alongside Levi, is one of 'the two most successful and critically acclaimed Italian-speaking novelists to have survived the Shoah [and] [...] engaged the experience of the concentration camps [...] in [...] poetry as well as [...] prose.'⁸ Like Levi, Bruck's writing bears witness to her Holocaust experience, though her life, both before and after the camps, was very different to that of the Turinese survivor.

Edith Steinschreiber, born in 1932, was the youngest child in a large and poor Jewish family, and grew up in a small village in north-east Hungary. In April 1944, at just twelve years of age, she was rounded up with the other Jews in the area and interned in a ghetto for a month before being deported to Auschwitz in late May. Upon arrival, the Hungarian Jews were subjected to the harsh selection process outlined above in the introduction and Bruck was separated from her mother, who was gassed shortly afterwards. Bruck discusses the intervention of a soldier who moved her from one line, where she had been sent along with her

⁸ Philip Balma, *Edith Bruck in the Mirror: Fictional Transitions and Cinematic Narratives*, Shofar Supplements in Jewish Studies (Ashland, US: Purdue University Press, 2014), p. 139.

mother, to the other. Not understanding the fate that awaited those sent to the left, Bruck's mother begged for her daughter to be allowed to stay with her, but Bruck was forced to the right. Unbeknown to mother and child, the soldier's action saved Bruck from the immediate death to which her mother and the other elderly, infirm and the very young were sent.⁹ This pivotal moment returns in Bruck's writing and, as well as being the traumatic moment of separation from her mother, it also represents her own extremely close brush with death.

As a result of the soldier's decision to move her into the right line of arrivals, Bruck was initially transferred to Birkenau, where her hair was shaved, she was disinfected and assigned clothes to wear. She remained in Lager C at Birkenau for three months and was later transferred a number of times, to Kaufering, Landsberg, Dachau, Christianstadt and, finally, Bergen-Belsen. Bruck's mother, father and older brother were murdered in the Lager, and this early loss of her parents reverberates in much of her writing. The separation from and subsequent loss of parents is a recurring theme in many survivors' writings, and is a notable feature in Paul Celan's work, as discussed in section 3.2.

The loss of her parents also contributed to Bruck's decision not to permanently return to her family home in Hungary after her liberation from the camp on 15th April 1945. Another motivation behind this decision was a desire to escape the strong residual anti-Semitism which was widespread in her country of birth.¹⁰ Bruck embarked instead on a number of emigrations, including the common Jewish post-Auschwitz relocation to Israel. Bruck's life was tumultuous and unsettled between her liberation from Bergen-Belsen in 1945 and her arrival in Rome in 1954, and she suffered a forced abortion, domestic abuse and three failed marriages by the age of twenty. Her third marriage was one of convenience with an acquaintance, in order to avoid military service, and she continues to use her third husband's surname. Her autobiographical prose work *Chi ti ama così*

⁹ Edith Bruck, *Chi ti ama così* (Milan: Lerici, 1959), p. 25.

¹⁰ Balma, p. 5.

relates these turbulent years in which she struggled to find a place she felt at ease.

In 1954 Bruck moved to Rome, and created a new home for herself, marrying the writer and director Nelo Risi. Bruck adopted Italian as her literary language, and began her lengthy and highly productive writing career with the publication of *Chi ti ama così* in 1959. Like Levi, Bruck has received most recognition for her prose works, however she has continued to publish poetry collections over four decades and counted poets such as Montale, Quasimodo, Ungaretti and fellow survivor-writer Primo Levi, among her friends.

Bruck is particularly dedicated to engaging with the public, and has spoken on innumerable occasions in schools in Italy. In another of her prose works Bruck discusses her testimonial endeavours, and the duty and difficulties of recalling the horrors of the past for future generations.¹¹ Bruck continues to write, predominantly semi-autobiographical prose which deals, in varying degrees of directness, with her Holocaust past. In a recent interview Bruck expressed her frustration at having been pigeonholed by her publisher: 'the editors, I think, ghettoized me definitively in my themes – which is yet another persecution, yet another tattoo, yet another mark.'¹² This 'ghettoizing' by her publisher – refusing to allow Bruck to simply be a writer, and continuing to superimpose the identity of *survivor*-writer on her – and the pressure to endlessly return to her Auschwitz past in her writing reflects the commercial power of the Holocaust, and inhibits the natural, if slow and painful, process of moving forward for Bruck. Reading Bruck's poetry collections, her desire to move beyond the Auschwitz past can be measured in quantitative terms: her first collection contains ten references to the Holocaust, her second only five, and her latest collection focuses instead on domestic objects within her home in Rome.

Bruck and Levi both published their first book of poems in the same year, 1975, entitled *Il tatuaggio* and *L'osteria di Brema* respectively. All of the poems in Levi's

¹¹ Edith Bruck, *Signora Auschwitz: il dono della parola* (Venice: Marsilio, 1999).

¹² Balma, [Appendix One: Interview with Edith Bruck, trans. by Elizabeth Hellman], p.186.

first collection were republished, along with additional poems and translations, in *Ad ora incerta* (1984). Bruck has published a further three collections of poems to date: *In difesa del padre* (1980), *Monologo* (1990) and *Specchi* (2005). Both writers have published translations of poetry, a clear indication of their regard for the genre and desire to ensure that it reaches as wide a readership as possible.

Despite their own evident convictions of poetry's value for society and for their own post-Auschwitz survivorship, Bruck and Levi's poetry has received very little critical attention to date. Indeed, Edith Bruck has been the subject of only a handful of academic works, despite a prolific and wide-ranging writing career which has spanned almost sixty years.¹³ Levi made the conscious decision to use poems as epigraphs for two of his most significant works: *Se questo è un uomo* and *La tregua*, and Bruck has consistently written and published poems over the decades since the Holocaust, addressing her experience with varying degrees of directness. Both, writers, therefore, have foregrounded poetry amongst their own writing, and this chapter seeks, for the first time, to place the poetry of these two survivors-writers side by side, to explore the role this genre has played in their post-Holocaust rehabilitation.

1.3 Survivorship and poetry

The concept of the Holocaust 'survivor', now omnipresent in modern public and academic thought, does not date back to the liberation of the camps, but is a

¹³ Surprisingly little critical work exists on Edith Bruck's work. One of the first and most dedicated researchers to write about Bruck is Elisa Guida. Guida's articles include 'L'etica del sopravvissuto nell'estetica di Edith Bruck', *Cuadernos de Filología Italiana*, 14 (2007), 187-204; 'Dall'era dei divieti alla memoria del XXI secolo: un percorso nella rappresentazione della Shoah attraverso la poetica di Edith Bruck', *Cuadernos de Filología Italiana*, 18 (2011), 141-159; and 'To write is bread. The function of writing for Edith Bruck', *Trauma and Memory*, 2:1 (2014), 25-31. Philip Balma has also published recent works on Bruck, including the aforementioned *Edith Bruck in the Mirror* and 'Edith Bruck's Experience in Italy: Publishing, Cinema and the Thematic Ghetto', *Italianistica Ultraiectina*, 2 (2007), 107-113. Rarely is Bruck considered on her own, but either alongside other survivors/writers or discussed in an appendix, see Cristina Villa, 'Perché la Shoah talvolta parla italiano? La letteratura italiana della deportazione razziale nelle opere di Edith Bruck ed Elisa Springer', *Italianistica Ultraiectina*, 2 (2007), 97-105; Enrico Mottinelli, *La neve nell'armadio: Auschwitz e la vergogna del mondo: con una conversazione con Edith Bruck* (Florence: Giuntina, 2013) and Marina Sanfilippo, 'Scrittrici e memoria della shoah: Liana Millu e Edith Bruck', *Zibaldone. Estudios italianos de La Torre del Virrey*, 4 (2014), 60-71.

later invention. The prisoners liberated in early 1945 were initially, for the most part, termed Displaced Persons (DPs), and their immediate concern was to literally rebuild the lives which had been almost completely destroyed in Auschwitz. The majority of the liberated prisoners had no notion of how many, if any, of their relatives had survived the war years, and where they might be found. Furthermore, emerging from the camps, prisoners were suffering the ravages of incarceration and slave labour. Starving, weak and in extremely poor health, a significant number of those who lived to see the liberation of the camps died in the following weeks as a result of their fragile health.

Beyond the immediate fight for survival post-Auschwitz, new driving imperatives began to emerge in the survivor community, many of which had fuelled their will to survive whilst they were inside the camps. A growing awareness of their unique status as first-hand witnesses of the Nazi genocide brought with it feelings of responsibility. Many survivors felt an impulse to share their experiences, to talk about the past. Committing their Auschwitz suffering to writing was a popular strategy amongst survivors, many of whom struggled to find the words to speak vocally about the horror they had witnessed first-hand, or who were met with embarrassment or even disinterest when attempting to discuss their Holocaust experience with others. Zoë Waxman writes 'in the immediate postwar period little time was given to understanding, or even listening to, the experiences of the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust.'¹⁴ Levi refers to a recurrent dream he had in Auschwitz, 'di parlare e di non essere ascoltati, di ritrovare la libertà e di restare soli'¹⁵ which, to his horror, seemed to come true in the immediate postwar period. Writing provided an outlet for survivors, allowing them to lay down the experiences, memories and feelings they felt unable to communicate in other ways: '*scrivo quello che non saprei dire a nessuno*'.¹⁶ Writing also had the advantage of offering a permanent, physical

¹⁴ Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, p. 95.

¹⁵ Levi, *La tregua*, p. 61.

¹⁶ Levi, *Se questo*, p. 126, my emphasis.

record, both for the survivors themselves, and for posterity, and existed in direct symbolic opposition to the Nazis' silencing aims.

As part of the long process of returning to life outside Auschwitz, many survivors began to write about their experiences very soon after the end of the war. Primo Levi discusses his urgent need to commit his experience to paper: 'ho scritto il libro appena sono tornato, nel giro di pochi mesi: tanti quei ricordi mi bruciavano dentro'.¹⁷ The burning desire to write was, this chapter suggests, driven by three main factors: a desire to remember the dead, a desire to process the trauma of the survivor's suffering, and a desire to share their experience. In other words, I suggest that writing – specifically poetry – performed a memorial, cathartic and testimonial function for survivor-writers.

Other studies of Holocaust literature have identified similar motives for writing: Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi outlines the following as key driving forces:

the desire for some sort of revenge; the need to bear witness "so that the world will know what we suffered"; the desire to commemorate the dead; the impulse to absolve oneself or one's companions of aspersions of passivity or complicity; the sense of mission, to warn humanity of its capacity for genocide.¹⁸

Certainly these sentiments can be found in Levi and Bruck's poetry, although the writers might take exception at the suggestion that they write for 'revenge'.¹⁹

Waxman discusses the way in which many works of survivor writing include:

a section in which the author attempts to explain why he or she has decided to record his or her experiences. Apart from paying homage to the dead, or leaving a document for their children, the most prominent reason motivating survivors to write their testimonies is to ensure that *we never forget*.²⁰

¹⁷ Levi, *Se questo*, p. 157.

¹⁸ Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 21.

¹⁹ The closest Levi comes to vengeful writing is his poem 'Per Adolf Eichmann' (*Ad ora incerta*, p. 33), which is accusatory, rather than vengeful, in tone.

²⁰ Waxman, p. 153 (emphasis in original).

This chapter argues for the addition of another, more personal, impetus behind survivor writing: the cathartic processing of the past. The demands of survivorship can, therefore, be thought of as following three, complementary, lines: remembering their experiences and those who had died; processing the past and attempting to work through their extreme suffering; and sharing their experiences, testifying to as wide an audience as possible. These three post-Auschwitz imperatives were shaped by the ongoing demands of survivorship, and the following sections will explore each in turn, addressing the way in which poetry helped survivors, specifically Primo Levi and Edith Bruck, with the rebuilding of their lives after the Holocaust.

First of all, however, it must be acknowledged that survivors wishing to write about their experiences faced a number of issues. The most controversial, and perhaps the most discussed, was the problematic nature of writing (poetry) after Auschwitz. Theodor Adorno's words have been explored in the introduction to this thesis, and while they most certainly loomed large over Primo Levi and Edith Bruck as survivor-writers, they by no means quelled their determination to write, or indeed their belief in the importance of writing. In an interview with Anthony Rudolf, Primo Levi directly engaged with Adorno's assertion, stating: 'after Auschwitz it is barbaric to write poetry except about Auschwitz.'²¹ Levi's stance builds upon Adorno's, however instead of renouncing literature, Levi's view is that in a post-Holocaust world, literature can not only be justified, but is essential, provided it is dedicated to a testimonial, preventative cause. While Adorno feared the replication of society's flaws through continued cultural and literary productions; Levi saw literature's potential to bring renewal.

Another significant issue facing survivor-writers is the assertion that, given the Holocaust's uniqueness in history and its resulting incommunicability, any attempt to use literary means to express the experience of genocide constitutes a betrayal of reality. Judith Kelly, a proponent of this theory, writes:

²¹ Rudolf, 'Primo Levi in London (1986)', in *Primo Levi*, ed. by Belpoliti and Gordon, p. 28.

The task of the survivor [...] is to bring the experience within the bounds of the understanding of the readers, and to do this the writer must have recourse to existing syntax, vocabulary and imagery. [...] In the telling of the events there is however a paradox because the writer necessarily distorts to some extent the reader's understanding of the events.²²

Kelly's stance, that the gravity of the Holocaust precludes a true representation, since language itself is insufficient to express the reality, is a viewpoint shared by critics such as Jürgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard; as well as Holocaust survivors such as Elie Wiesel, who stated that: '[t]he Holocaust cannot be described, it cannot be communicated, it is unexplainable'.²³ Primo Levi also alluded to the difficulty of Holocaust expression in his first literary depiction of his experiences, *Se questo è un uomo*: 'la nostra lingua manca di parole per esprimere questa offesa, la demolizione dell'uomo'.²⁴ The dearth of appropriate language and the danger of reducing the gravity of the reality in order to communicate the Holocaust, even if only inevitably to a limited extent, did not, however, dissuade Levi, Wiesel, and many of their fellow survivor-writers, from attempting to convey the reality of the camps through literature. Pier Vincenzo Mangaldo discusses the paradox of the Lager experience, terming it: 'la contraddizione necessaria fra la assoluta concretezza e l'altrettanto assoluta impossibilità di comprenderla (e prima ancora di dirla)'.²⁵

The difficulty of conveying the extent of the Holocaust reality, of rendering it comprehensible to an outsider, does not, of course, exclusively impede literary attempts, but all attempts at communication. As readers and recipients of testimony we cannot expect to understand the full extent of the horrors of Auschwitz, not least because the survivor is inevitably unable to give a full account due to restraints of space and time, but also because of the sensory deprivations of the reader/listener: we cannot smell, taste, hear, touch or see

²² Judith Kelly, *Primo Levi: Recording and Reconstruction in the Testimonial Literature* (Leicester: Troubador, 2000), p. 51.

²³ Michael Nutkiewicz, 'Shame, Guilt, and Anguish in Holocaust Survivor Testimony', *The Oral History Review*, 30:7 (Winter-Spring, 2003), 1-22 (p. 17).

²⁴ Primo Levi, *Se questo, p. 23.*

²⁵ Pier Vincenzo Mangaldo, 'La letteratura della Shoah', in *Sterminio e stermini*, ed. by Dimitri D'Andrea and Renata Badii, pp. 273-292 (p. 277).

what the camps were like during the Holocaust, perhaps this is why some survivors, such as Paul Celan, adopt such startling metaphors when describing Auschwitz (see section 3.8). A further factor which impedes the full and complete transmission of the Holocaust reality is the fallibility of human memory: no survivor could be expected to remember everything they had experienced during the weeks, months and years of their incarceration, and arguably many memories might have been suppressed due to their traumatic nature.

Once we openly acknowledge the difficulties of communicating the reality, we effectively overcome the issues of ineffability outlined by Kelly, Habermas, Lyotard, Wiesel and others, since the reader/listener acknowledges that they are not truly experiencing or comprehending the real lived experience of the deportee, nor are they appreciating the true horror of the camps. It is evident from the fact that survivors such as Wiesel both express concerns surrounding the incommunicability of the Holocaust and, in seeming contradiction, write and talk about the Holocaust, that discussion of the ineffability of Auschwitz is not intended to preclude discussion, but to temper the audience's reception, to stress that no communication will ever do justice to the reality, no matter how fluent and graphic it appears.

As with the communication of any experience, there is an insurmountable chasm between what the recounter experienced and witnessed, and what their recipient understands him/her to have experienced and witnessed. This is not unique to the Holocaust, but inherent in every attempt to convey one's experience to any reader or listener. The extent of the gap depends upon the skill of the communicator, and the willingness and receptiveness of their listener/reader. Testimony is necessarily established upon a mutual effort, made between the survivor imparting their knowledge and experience, and the recipient, who attempts to comprehend and appreciate this communication, be it transmitted aurally, visually, or even literarily. As this thesis aims to demonstrate with the close analysis of a number of poems, poetry arguably holds the potential for a particularly nuanced and vivid communication of the Holocaust reality, due to the complexity of its composition and the resulting

frame of reference, which allows the reader to access the survivor's most intimate recollections and experiences.

Many survivors questioned the propriety of using pre-existing language to describe the events of the Lager, fearing that attempts to describe their experiences would unavoidably entail approximation and a potentially detrimental process of comparison. Some survivors, such as Paul Celan, pushed the boundaries of language, creating many neologisms and pairing incongruous words to create new effects and convey new meaning (see section 3.4), but ultimately survivors were restricted by the limits of their chosen language. Ernst Cassirer acknowledges the problems of extreme expression using a pre-existing linguistic framework: '[n]o poet can create an entirely new language. He has to adopt the words and he has to respect the fundamental rules of his language'.²⁶ Cassirer continues, however, by expressing the poet's unique ability to overcome such obstacles and imbue existing language with a new depth of significance: 'the poet gives [language] not only a new turn but also a new life. [...] poetry is able to express all those innumerable nuances, those delicate shades of feeling, that are impossible in other modes of expression'.²⁷ Cassirer's view of poetry has been echoed by innumerable poets, critics and commentators in the decades since he wrote *An Essay on Man*. Indeed, many writers have offered explanations of what poetry is and how it functions which are particularly pertinent for considering survivor poetry: Yves Bonnefoy, for example, writes 'poetry is an act by which the relation of words to reality is renewed'.²⁸ Bonnefoy's words suggest that poetry is the mode of communication which allows for the most successful expression of reality: this view of poetry is vitally important when considering the imperatives of survivor writing, and is a view supported by the American critic Dana Gioia, who writes '[p]oetry is the art of using words charged with their

²⁶ Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945), p. 226.

²⁷ Cassirer, pp. 226-7.

²⁸ Yves Bonnefoy, *Times Literary Supplement*, 12th August 2005 (see *Quote Poet Unquote: Contemporary Quotations on Poets and Poetry*, ed. by Dennis O'Driscoll (Washington: Copper Canyon Press: 2008), p. 4).

utmost meaning.’²⁹ Gioia’s essay, ‘Can Poetry Matter?’ explores the genre’s declining popularity and prevalence in modern America, and this defence of poetry (which itself belongs to a centuries old tradition, originating with Philip Sidney’s *The Defence of Poesy* (c. 1579)) focuses on the form’s unique qualities: the intensity of the picture it paints and its ability to convey meaning more clearly and compellingly than any other literary genre.

Poet and critic Edward Hirsch, writing in *The Washington Post*’s ‘Book World’s Poet’s Choice’ column, effectively draws together the various threads of argument outlined above, stating:

[p]oetry connects us to what is deepest in ourselves. It gives us access to our own feelings, which are often shadowy, and engages us in the art of making meaning. [...] Poetry is an ancient and international activity - - it precedes prose in all literatures, and there has never been a culture without it. This suggests how deeply we need the knowledge - - the wisdom - - that poetry carries in its body.³⁰

Hirsch uses his first column in the newspaper to succinctly convey what he considers poetry to be and what it is capable of. Essential to humanity, intrinsic to human culture of all forms and ages, Hirsch writes of the form’s capacity to express our most intimate feelings, the very core of our being. Poetry invites the writer to engage in ‘the art of making meaning’, it is the constant creation of meaning: the reforming and recreation of language. In this, Hirsch corroborates Cassirer’s arguments, and offers a rejection of those who claim that pre-existing language is unsuitable for post-Holocaust expression. Poetry, their arguments imply, effectively overcomes this obstacle.

Levi and Bruck both evidently felt a need to write poetry about Auschwitz, in order to memorialize the dead, process their experiences and testify, ensuring that people were made to face the atrocity of the Nazi camps. They are just two

²⁹ Dana Gioia, ‘Can Poetry Matter?’, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 267:5 (May 1991), 94-106, see <https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/poetry/gioia/gioia.htm> [accessed 13 September 2015].

³⁰ Edward Hirsch, ‘Book World’s Poet’s Choice’, *The Washington Post*, 13 January 2002 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/entertainment/books/2002/01/13/today-on-page-12-of-book-world/ce2ed888-55aa-48ce-a1e0-a5f8c34bdc5d/> [accessed 13 January 2015].

of a number of survivors who used poetry to convey their Holocaust experiences, including Paul Celan, Rose Ausländer and Elie Wiesel. The significant number of survivor-poets indicates that the impulse to compose poetry was not restricted to certain social classes, nationalities or degrees of education. On the contrary, the range of survivor poets is indicative of a certain, common compulsive desire amongst survivors to compose poetry as part of the post-Holocaust rehabilitation process.

There are a number of possible explanations for the survivors' selection of poetry as an appropriate genre for their post-liberation writing. Poetry has, since the Middle Ages, if not earlier, been inextricably linked with love and religious devotion; and as such it has a long tradition of being used to reflect individual torment. One only needs to turn to John Donne's religious poetry, or, for an Italian example, the work of the *stilnovisti*, and Michelangelo, to see a link between poetry and the expression of suffering. Tradition itself, therefore, far from rendering it an incongruous choice, makes poetry a particularly natural form for conveying the Holocaust experience. Given this enduring association between poetry and suffering, it is easy to imagine why Holocaust survivors have been attracted to poetry as a cathartic form of writing. As a literary form it is uniquely suited to the survivor, since it offers a nuanced vehicle for the expression of the survivor's post-liberation autonomy: freed from the mental and physical degradation of the camps, poetry allows the survivor to literally construct a literary work to convey their wealth of emotions and experiences.

The composition of poetry can be considered the antithesis of the Holocaust experience, in the sense that the writer is in a position of complete authority, and constructs their work according to their own personal desires and specifications. While the experience of the Nazi camps was debasement and subordination, poetry offers a multitude of individual decisions, and the survivor-poet is able to select and control every detail of their creation, from line length, to rhyme scheme and meter, or lack thereof. Poetical testimony can be thought of as the most emphatic rejection and countering of the Nazi genocidal aims: it provides a space for a (Jewish) voice, which was precisely what the Nazi party

sought to quash through their process of mass murder. Poetry also, by virtue of its three-dimensional process of composition which necessitates not only words, but their spatial positioning, arrangement and interaction, represents creation, as opposed to the intended annihilation of Europe's Jewish populations.

The formal constraints and literary manipulations associated with poetry: rhyme-scheme, meter and line breaks, could be considered as stylistic intrusions, restrictions which could interfere with the integrity of survivor writing, affecting the fluent transmission of content. The importance and prevalence of formal styles has, however, dwindled over the last century, to the extent that writers composing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are able to write with very few formal expectations from readers and critics. Poems need not have a specific or consistent meter, rhyme scheme or appearance on the page, and the poet is at liberty to control every aspect of their work, without the requirement to adhere to a pre-established form. The composition of poetry can be considered a complete act of creation, allowing the poet to literally shape their work. The writer does not simply choose the words s/he wishes to use, and the images s/he wishes to convey, but elects their very position and appearance on the page.

Rhyme – if used – and meter offer additional insights to the reader, while end-stopped lines and enjambment can be as expressive as the words themselves. Rhymes can be used to aurally and visually link concepts, often in surprising ways, and the very meter of the lines can express harmony, discord or an infinity of sensations in-between these two extremes. All of these elements distinguish poetry from prose and offer a much richer potential for self-expression for the writer. After the experience of complete loss of autonomy in the camps, it is perhaps unsurprising that many survivors chose poetry as a mode of expression. The author's freedom to create and shape poetry, in the fullest sense of the word, is also of rich significance for the reader, most especially in the survivor context. The authorial decisions inherent in poetry resonate with significance and provide a lucid frame of reference through which the reader is able to access the survivor's highly intimate experiences. Not only can poetry be considered a cathartic, restorative tool for the survivor; but it is also a uniquely suited genre

for the expression of survivorship in the post-Auschwitz world. Edith Bruck herself refers to poetry's unique expressive potential: '[e]ven if I talk more or less about the same things, poetry allows you to say so many things in just one verse, while in prose you develop a story quite differently.'³¹

Robert Antelme recognised poetry's potential to fulfil the complex demands of post-Holocaust survivorship, and prevent a repetition of the genocidal barbarity of the Holocaust, soon after the war's conclusion. Comparing poetry favourably to prose, he observed that poetry did not 'run so great a risk of creating that naked, "objective" testimony, that kind of abstract accusation, that photography that only frightens us without explicitly teaching anything.'³² For Antelme, poetry triumphs as a genre because it fulfils the ethical demands of post-Holocaust survival more fully than prose: while the latter presents an image which can be absorbed and forgotten with great rapidity, the latter demands engagement, interaction and a more full degree of processing.

Ernst Cassirer alludes to another fundamental asset of poetry: '[i]t is self-knowledge and self-criticism. [...] [poetry provides] a new and deeper understanding, a reinterpretation of the poet's personal life.'³³ Cassirer's assessment alludes to the reason behind poetry's suitability as a genre for Holocaust survivorship. The 'deeper understanding', this intimacy Cassirer refers to, is analogous with what Michael Hamburger, one of the English translators of Paul Celan's poetry, calls 'the truth of poetry'. Poetry is, Hamburger writes, 'a process of exploration and discovery.'³⁴ Closely linked with humankind's intimate, inner thoughts and emotions, with the extremes of human life and experience, poetry is a literary genre often considered to express most adequately the true, visceral reality of life. The intimate, (self-)reflexive insight it provides to poet and reader alike have contributed to securing the genre's

³¹ Balma, [Appendix One: Interview with Edith Bruck, trans. by Elizabeth Hellman], p. 178.

³² Antelme, 'Poetry and the Testimony of the Camps', in *On Robert Antelme's The Human Race*, ed. by Dobbels, p. 33.

³³ Cassirer, p. 52.

³⁴ Michael Hamburger, *The Truth of Poetry: Tensions in Modernist Poetry since Baudelaire* (London: Anvil Press Poetry Ltd., 2007), p. 37.

enduring success as a means of communicating the extremes of human existence, and is a fundamental reason for poetry's successful conveyance of Holocaust survivorship.

Poetry, with its wealth of formal and stylistic options, is the ideal vehicle for the expression of post-Holocaust survivorship. It offers survivors a means of overcoming the ineffability of the Holocaust, providing a means to use pre-existing language in new ways to express the unimaginable horror of Auschwitz. A genre of highly personalised creation, poetry provides Primo Levi and Edith Bruck with a vehicle for the three imperatives of post-Holocaust survivorship: remembering, processing and informing. It offers a means to express the complexity of life after atrocity, and to effectively convey this reality to the reader. In the following sections I shall closely analyse a total of seven poems, to demonstrate the various ways in which poetry facilitated the reconstruction of life for Levi and Bruck, after the trauma of the Holocaust.

1.4 The memorial function of poetry

Returning to life after Auschwitz many survivors were to learn that the family and friends from whom they had been separated on arrival had perished in the camps. Some discovered that they were the sole survivors of previously extensive families. Of some communities no traces were left whatsoever. Facing the devastation of this incredible human loss, many survivors felt a determination to ensure these men, women and children would not be forgotten, both on an individual and collective level. Many adopted literature as a means to remember the dead: '[s]urvivor-writers, mining torturous memories, have looked to writing largely as a means of retrieval, reflection, description, analysis, and *commemoration*.'³⁵

The memorializing impulse of those who suffered in the Nazi camps was evident, on a physical level, as early as May 1943, when prisoners in Majdanek created a

³⁵ Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *The End of the Holocaust* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2011), p. 167 (my emphasis).

concrete sculpture of three soaring eagles, and secretly buried human ashes at its base.³⁶ This was not only a monument symbolizing the hope of eventual liberation and freedom, but a symbolic burial of the murdered inmates. Evidence of the drive among survivors to memorialize the dead is clear in the fact that, as Harold Marcuse writes, in the early postwar years physical Holocaust memorials 'were initiated by Holocaust and concentration camp survivors, or by refugees'.³⁷

Poetry was another medium through which survivors chose to memorialize the dead. The adoption of poetry as a vehicle for remembrance and a space for mourning is not surprising, considering that 'in contemporary times when verse may seem to have lost its mass audience, poetry still has a habit of emerging as an expressive medium for those that have experienced great pain and loss.'³⁸ Poetry indeed seems to emerge in situations where mourning is expressed: poems are often read at funerals, and even offered as a source of comfort to bereaved relatives. Jahan Ramazani discusses this link between mourning and poetry in his work on modern elegy, suggesting that contemporary society has become detached from death and loss, often sugar-coating mourning. It is for this reason that poets and their elegies, he argues, are so vitally important, since they represent an open engagement with the pain of loss.³⁹

The memorial poetry of survivor-writers often involves the description of specific individuals, most often individuals who had a close personal relationship with the writer. In this way this type of poem often closely resembles the elegy, since it 'honours the dead by bringing the present into a dynamic relation with the past'.⁴⁰ Poems, with their traditional associations with memorialisation, offer the survivor a means of creating a literary monument for their lost loved ones.

³⁶ See Harold Marcuse, 'Holocaust Memorials', *The American Historical Review*, 115 (2010), 53-89 (p. 56).

³⁷ Marcuse, p. 60.

³⁸ James Richards, 'The Catharsis of Poetry', *Fortnight*, 455 (Nov. 2007), p. 27.

³⁹ Jahan Ramazani, *The Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), ix.

⁴⁰ James Anderson Winn, *The Poetry of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 35.

The millions who died in Auschwitz were denied formal burial, their physical presence has been obliterated. In a number of their poems Levi and Bruck offer the dead a form of literary presence, creating a space for them and ensuring they are not forgotten. In the two poems analysed in this section: Edith Bruck's 'Fratello mio'⁴¹ and Primo Levi's '25 febbraio 1944',⁴² the two survivor-writers refer in very distinct ways to individuals they have lost: Bruck overtly, and Levi obliquely.

John Berger suggests that *all* poetry is effectively poetry of mourning:

Every authentic poem contributes to the labour of poetry [...] to bring together what life has separated or violence has torn apart [...] Poetry can repair no loss, but it defies the space which separates. And it does this by its continual labour of reassembling what has been scattered.⁴³

This reassembling function which Berger ascribes to poetry is an apt description of the survivor-writers' imperative to remember and, in doing so, to offer a new form of life to the dead, as can be seen in Bruck's poem below.

Edith Bruck's 'Fratello mio' will be the first poem analysed here and is a valuable example of how poetry assisted the writer's post-Holocaust rehabilitation, by offering a means for memorialising her murdered brother. Bruck's first collection of poems, *Il tatuaggio*, contains various examples of 'memorial poems', which are chiefly addressed to members of her immediate family who did not survive the Nazi camps: her mother ('Quel pensiero'),⁴⁴ father ('L'uguaglianza padre!')⁴⁵ and brother ('fratello mio').⁴⁶ A recurring stylistic technique within Bruck's memorial poems is to conclude by entering the poem herself, and thus mixing memorial with a reflexive self-examination of her own reality, in marked contrast to that of her deceased relative. Invariably this technique allows Bruck to pledge continued allegiance to the family member and assert her dedication to

⁴¹ Edith Bruck, *Il tatuaggio* (Parma: Guanda, 1975), p. 20.

⁴² Levi, *Ad ora incerta*, p. 15.

⁴³ John Berger, 'The Hour of Poetry', in *The Sense of Sight: Writings by John Berger* ed. by Lloyd Spencer (New York: Vintage, 1993), p. 251.

⁴⁴ Bruck, *Il tatuaggio*, p. 17.

⁴⁵ Bruck, *Il tatuaggio*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Bruck, *Il tatuaggio*, p. 20.

memorialisation. Bruck's entry into the poem also demonstrates how the medium of poetry has facilitated the emergence of a post-Auschwitz identity, one which has negotiated through the poem a new relationship dynamic with the missing dead.

'Fratello mio', like 'Quel pensiero' and 'L'uguaglianza padre!', is written in the first person, and could be considered a dramatic monologue. Bruck utilises poetry to directly address the family members she has lost: asking questions to which she cannot hope to receive an answer. Bruck's adoption of literature as a means of facilitating a conversation with the dead – a technique which allows an expression of the sensations of loss, abandonment and guilt associated with the loss of her family members – is also present in Bruck's prose works,⁴⁷ and allows for a fuller engagement with her memories of the lost.

'Fratello mio' is a rather unusual memorial, since, in the strict sense, Bruck's actual recollections of her brother occupy a mere nine lines at the start of this sixty-five line poem. These recollections, far from being elegiac and respectful in tone, are reminiscent of childhood accusations and recriminations. Bruck describes her brother as a 'presenza pallida' (l. 4), and 'spia dei miei piccoli giochi proibiti' (l. 6). Bruck concludes this collection of memories with the distinctly unheroic, anti-sublime recollection: 'mi hai fatto pipì addosso/ non ricordo altro...' (ll. 8-9). The opening nine lines are characteristic of sibling antagonising, however, despite the negative language Bruck uses to describe her brother: 'medicante' (l. 3), 'natura malaticcia' (l. 5), 'spia' (l. 6); a strong profession of familial solidarity is inherent in the opening address of the poem, 'fratello mio', which is repeated like a refrain throughout the poem. The rhythmically even, iambic, nature of 'fratello mio' (uxuxu)⁴⁸ creates an almost chant-like resonance

⁴⁷ See Edith Bruck, *Lettera alla madre* (Milan: Garzanti, 1988).

⁴⁸ Please note that throughout this thesis 'u' shall be used to refer to an unstressed beat and 'x' to a stressed beat. For those unfamiliar with poetic metre, the following basic outline might be helpful:

ux = iamb

xu = trochee

uu = pyrrhic

xx = spondee

xuu = dactyl

which allows Bruck to consistently emphasise the centrality of her brother, and thus highlight the memorial dimension of the poem.

As has been previously mentioned, this poem is a rather complex and unusual memorial poem, since the emphasis is less on the actual past life of the victim, and instead on the potential future denied to them by Nazi brutality. Bruck concisely encapsulates this focus in lines 10-11: 'Fratello mio/ cosa potevi diventare?', a rhetorical question which returns twice more in the poem, and to which Bruck herself presents various possible answers. In response to her question, Bruck delineates three postwar eventualities for her brother, which in fact epitomise the true post-liberation life choices of many Jewish Holocaust survivors: emigrating to South America, relocating to the USA and returning to one's place of birth (as indeed both Levi and Bruck did, the former permanently; the latter only temporarily). The first two possible lives Bruck imagines for her brother display an enduring connection with a Jewish, Zionist cause: 'nel cuore il progetto di tornare in Israele' (l. 18) and 'con dei figli orgogliosi/ della guerra dei sei giorni/ pronti a far parte dell'aviazione israeliana' (ll. 22-4). Bruck highlights the shared mentality of the Jewish survivors, who are united in being:

troppo condizionati
da un passato da dimenticare
da un futuro da costruire (ll. 31-3).

The sense of potential in these lines, to construct a new future – albeit a future necessitated by a tragic past – is immediately negated by the third postwar life Bruck imagines for her brother. This final scenario, introduced by the recurring rhetorical question, this time constricted into a single line 'Fratello mio cosa potevi diventare', rather than with its usual line end caesura, as if to convey Bruck's urgency to settle upon the realistic, likely future her brother might have

uux = anapaest
xuuu = paeon (in first position).

had; is one in which anti-Semitism and Jewish suffering persist.⁴⁹ In this reality, the return to the home country, Bruck challenges her brother:

dove all'udire una parola antisemita
abbassavi lo sguardo
inghiottendo obbedienza
per convenienza
per debolezza (ll. 38-42).

The depiction of such behaviour - a meek acceptance of continued anti-Semitism - is both condemnatory and pessimistic. Bruck not only suggests that the prejudices which culminated in the Holocaust might continue to thrive (as indeed they did, and arguably do in many parts of the world), but that even the survivors themselves are guilty of allowing such prejudices to proliferate. She suggests that even first-hand experience of the Holocaust would be insufficient to rouse her brother from his weakness, into action.

Of the three eventualities Bruck imagines for her brother, this last one, she concludes, would be 'un probabile futuro' (l. 46), since 'la vita non è più giusta/ della tua morte' (ll. 49-50). These lines demonstrate another disparity between this poem and standard memorial poetry: Bruck's pessimistic view of post-Holocaust life leads her not to wish her brother was still alive, but to suggest that the reality of a survivor's continuing life is not necessarily any better, or fairer than dying in the Nazi camps.

Having established that survival would not necessarily have been a positive outcome for her brother, Bruck concludes her poem with a new form of address:

Fratello mio numero cavia torcia
cenere albero
tra milioni di alberi (ll. 51-53).

This string of nouns, united through enjambment and through Bruck's characteristic lack of punctuation, brings the poet to finally acknowledge, and present to the reader, the true fate of her brother who, upon entering the camps

⁴⁹ This was a reality Bruck herself endured, and was one of the reasons she chose to move to Rome.

entered into an inevitable process of change which altered him from a brother, to a number, to a human guinea-pig, to a flame in the crematorium, to ashes, and finally to a tree, amongst millions of trees. This final stage in the linear process of Nazi extermination, refers to the six million trees planted in the Martyrs' Forest in Jerusalem to commemorate the Jews who died during the Holocaust. Though Bruck's brother has, metaphorically speaking, become a tree through death, this form of imagined reincarnation establishes a positive cycle: the brother becomes a physical part of the 'terra amata così amata da nostra madre' (l. 55), and therefore central to the first two, more optimistic lives Bruck imagined for her brother.

Bruck, as a survivor, is not represented by a tree in the Martyrs' Forest, but she too considers herself a physical, living memorial. She is a 'madre radice' (l. 59) who nourishes and sustains her tree family 'con il suo grido/ con il suo respiro' (ll. 62-3). Bruck's metaphorical pledge of nutrients can be considered as a reference to her poetry itself, which, in its memorial dimension, keeps the memory of her lost brother alive, and attests to his life and loss just as the tree planted in his, and every other Holocaust victim's honour does. Bruck's poem concludes with an acknowledgement of her own commitment and dedication to remembering the life that was lost as a (self-)consolatory act which does not, and cannot compensate for the future which the Nazi regime denied to all its victims, and, arguably, even to those prisoners who survived.

'Fratello mio' demonstrates the difficulty with which Bruck struggles to accept her brother's death, and his lack of a future. The significant length of the poem, a feature consistent with Bruck's other memorial poems, would seem to corroborate Susan Gubar's suggestion that:

The enormity of the event [...] often propelled poets in two diametrically opposed directions: on the one hand, toward ellipses, fragmentation, in short poems that exhibit their inadequacy by shutting down with a sort of

premature closure; on the other, toward verbosity in long poems that register futility by reiterating an exhausted failure to achieve closure.⁵⁰

Bruck indeed wilfully rejects closure, since this would to some extent negate the memorial intent of the poem. Instead, she focuses relentlessly on her lost brother, concluding the poem with the promise to continue her commemoration until her own death.

The second poem to be analysed in this section is Primo Levi's '25 febbraio 1944', composed on 9th January 1946. In marked contrast to Bruck's 'Fratello mio', '25 febbraio 1944' is just seven lines long and does not refer directly to the individual it memorializes. In this sense it is a highly personal commemoration, since the writer alone knows for sure the identity of the unnamed woman he alludes to. Luciana Nissim Momigliano, one of the friends with whom Levi was deported to Auschwitz, describes the writer's feelings towards a second woman in their group: 'Primo ha amato molto Vanda.'⁵¹ Vanda Maestro, who appears in Levi's other writings, is likely to be the imagined interlocutor in Levi's poem, as well as the woman he refers to (also anonymously) in *Se questo è un uomo*, when describing his arrival at Auschwitz:

Accanto a me, serrata come me fra corpo e corpo, era stata per tutto il viaggio una donna. Ci conoscevamo da molti anni, e la sventura ci aveva colti insieme, ma poco sapevamo l'uno dell'altra. Ci dicemmo allora, nell'ora della decisione, cose che non si dicono fra i vivi. Ci salutammo, e fu breve; ciascuno salutò nell'altro la vita.⁵²

The date which forms the title of the poem, 25th February 1944, is the date on which Levi's convey arrived at the camps, and the date that Levi was separated from his female friends, Luciana Nissim Momigliano and Vanda Maestro. While Luciana would survive the camps, Vanda was murdered in October 1944.

⁵⁰ Susan Gubar, 'The Long and the Short of Holocaust Verse', *New Literary History*, 35:3 (Summer, 2004), 443-68 (p. 443).

⁵¹ Alessandra Chiappano, 'La figura di Luciana Nissim e le deportazioni femminili: Necessità di una storiografia di genere?', in Luciana Nissim Momigliano, *Ricordi della casa dei morti e altri scritti*, ed. by Alessandra Chiappano (Florence: Giuntina, 2008), p. 132. Chiappano asserts in footnote 29 that Vanda Maestro was almost definitely the woman alluded to in Levi's poem.

⁵² Levi, *Se questo*, p. 16.

The title of Levi's poem provides a very specific temporal reference, which is, in fact, the only reference to the Holocaust. The fact that the date is Levi's only oblique allusion to Auschwitz in this poem is perhaps indicative of the weight of suffering that Levi felt those war years were inherently imbued with. The use of the date as a title of the poem also explicitly establishes this poem as *Levi's* personal experience of the Holocaust, and simultaneously acts as an epitaph on the literary tombstone he has composed to commemorate the unnamed woman.

Levi's decision to keep the identity of the memorialized female secret is not only evidence of his desire to use poetry for his own personal and private monument, but also provides the poem with a wider memorial function, standing in for all women murdered in the camps. Written with the deceased woman as the imagined interlocutor, Levi's poem is an intensely personal conversation in which he expresses his regret and sadness at her loss. It is important to note that, while Levi includes dedications (often simply initials) in his poems, '25 febbraio 1944' includes no such dedication, which further strengthens both the intimacy of the poem, while simultaneously imbuing it with universal relevance for all the women who died during the Holocaust.

This septet is the shortest poem published by Levi about the Holocaust, and the second shortest poem he ever published.⁵³ Written on 9th January 1946 it represents one of Levi's first poetical responses to Auschwitz. Beginning with the conditional tense, 'Vorrei', which will be repeated in l. 3, Levi establishes immediately that the Holocaust caused an irreparable chasm between the world as Levi would like it to be, and the harsh reality. Levi begins 'Vorrei credere qualcosa oltre,/ Oltre che morte ti ha disfatta' (ll. 1-2). Expressing his desire to believe something other than the death of the unnamed woman, Levi repeats the word 'oltre' in two prominent positions: at the end of line one and immediately afterwards at the start of line two. This repetition forces the reader to dwell on this word which, especially when read out loud, could be elided in its

⁵³ The only shorter poem is '2000', which is just 5 lines long, written on 11th January 1982. *Ad ora incerta*, p. 61.

first usage (qualcosa^{oltre}). 'Oltre' is an interesting word choice, since it holds connotations of both 'other', and 'beyond', which in this context implies not only the afterlife, but also Levi's desire to move completely outside of the Holocaust realm to an alternative reality in which the unnamed woman is not dead.

Levi's reference to the unnamed woman's death ('morte ti ha disfatta') is a direct literary reference to Dante's *Inferno*: 'non avrei creduto/che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta',⁵⁴ and therefore not only draws a direct parallel between Hell and the Nazi camps, but also effectively enshrines the woman in the literary canon, by repeating and associating her with Dante's immortal words. It must be noted that in doing this Levi depersonalizes her death: it is not the Nazis or Auschwitz which killed her, but death itself, which elevates the woman from the squalid horror of the camps, removing her from the Nazi machinery of murder. Similarly, Levi's phrasing shies away from directly stating her death, using instead the verb 'disfatta'. 'Disfatta' offers the reader the only clue that the imagined interlocutor is a woman, given the gendered inflection of the word. 'Disfatta' would become a fundamental concept in Holocaust poetry, and one seized by Salvatore Quasimodo in reference to the Holocaust, as shall be discussed in the Chapter 2, since what had been 'disfatta' could also be 'rifatta'.

Levi expresses his inability to *rifare* the unnamed woman in this memorial poem, however, and the seven lines are shaped by the two uses of 'vorrei' at the start of the first and third lines, which simultaneously express the writer's desire to act in one way, and his inability to do so. Line two of the poem has a decelerating rhythm, caused by two dactylic feet (xuu xuu) followed by two trochees (xu xu), forcing the reader, and indeed Levi, to face and absorb the reality of the unnamed woman's demise.

Levi follows this sad reality, however, with another desire 'Vorrei poter dire la forza' (l. 3), in which three verbs are stacked upon one another, and all, it is implied, rendered powerless by the writer's inability to express himself. This

⁵⁴ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, III, 56-7.

ineffability echoes his description in *Se questo è un uomo*, quoted above, in which he refers to the conversation he had with the unnamed woman in the cramped carriage, where they said ‘cose che non si dicono fra i vivi’.

The final five lines taken together form the second end-stopped section of the poem, the first one being the desire expressed by Levi in lines 1-2.

Vorrei poter dire la forza
Con cui desiderammo allora,
Noi già sommersi,
Di potere ancora una volta insieme
Camminare liberi sotto il sole. (ll. 3-7)

This second section contains two uses of the verb ‘to be able’, suggesting the doubly thwarted desires of those crushed by Auschwitz: Levi feels *unable* to talk about something they were *unable* to do.

Line 5 marks a rhythmic change from the iambic tetrameter of the previous line, with the stressed monosyllable ‘Noi’, followed by a trochaic dimeter (x xuxu). This is the shortest line of the poem, at just five syllables long. The trochees create a falling rhythm, which is a mimetic representation of Levi’s words themselves, as he describes himself and the unnamed woman as ‘già sommersi’. This term, ‘sommersi’, is essential to Levi’s conception of the Holocaust past, and returns in a number of places in his writing, most often coupled with its opposite, ‘salvati’.⁵⁵ In *Se questo è un uomo*, written during the same time that Levi composed this poem, he describes the ‘sommersi’ as:

Massa anonima, continuamente rinnovata e sempre identica, dei non-uomini che marciano e faticano in silenzio, spenta in loro la scintilla divina, già troppo vuoti per soffrire veramente. Si esita a chiamarli vivi: si esita a chiamar morte la loro morte, davanti a cui essi non temono perché sono troppo stanchi per comprenderla.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ ‘I sommersi e i salvati’ is the title of a chapter in *Se questo è un uomo*, as well as the title of another major work by Levi, published in 1986.

⁵⁶ Levi, *Se questo*, pp. 81-82.

Levi continues by writing ‘se potessi racchiudere in una immagine tutto il male del nostro tempo, sceglierei [i sommersi]’.⁵⁷ Referring to himself and the woman as ‘sommersi’ has the effect of literally describing the way in which upon arrival at Auschwitz they were already irreparably ensnared in the web of destruction. It also creates a spatial distinction between the camps and the world outside of which they dreamed. ‘Sommersi’ creates the impression of submergence, of being dragged down to Hell, and is an image which starkly contrasts with the final line of the poem.

The two final lines are rhythmically identical, composed of an anapaest followed by an iamb, repeated twice and concluding with an unstressed hyperbeat (uux ux uux ux u). The only two hendecasyllabic lines of the poem, ll. 6-7 demonstrate Levi’s conscious return to a more structured and determinedly literary style. This regularity is achieved by the elision of vowels in the penultimate line, which effectively becomes a string of run-on words: ‘di potere^ancora^una^volta^insieme’, most of which qualify, as indeed the preceding three lines have, the final line of the poem. ‘Camminare liberi sotto il sole’ is the crux of the poem, and the thwarted shared wish of the writer and the unnamed woman is placed into sharper relief by the knowledge of the horror that really faced them. ‘Sotto il sole’ directly echoes the penultimate line of ‘Buna’, another poem analysed in this chapter, and written by Levi just days before ‘25 febbraio 1944’. The implied heat of the sun also complements the freedom Levi writes about, creating a paradisaic image of Italy and home, in contrast to the physical containment of the carriages, and later the barracks within the camps, into which the inmates were crammed.

Vanda Maestro would never return to Turin to feel this freedom and the warmth of the sun, although her memory is upheld in this intensely personal and private memorial poem. Levi uses the date of 25th February 1944 to give his poem a spatial and temporal anchoring, which the reader of his prose works knows to be the date of his arrival at Auschwitz, and his separation from the unknown

⁵⁷ Levi, *Se questo*, p. 82.

woman. This poem repeats the verb 'vorrei' to express Levi's sadness and sense of futility at his inability to change the reality of life after Auschwitz, although he consciously elevates the death of his lost loved one by describing her loss using Dante's own words – carving out a space for her within the literary canon, and using words which have stood the test of time over the centuries to describe extreme human suffering.

Levi finishes the work with a positive image, of the sun beating down over the pair as they walk freely as they used to. It is a dream which, although intensely imagined as the camps drew nearer, was not to be realised. It shows his desire, however, to focus on their shared, positive memories, instead of the horror of the unnamed woman's death. It is worth pointing out that neither of the memorial poems discussed in this section focus on people the writers actually witnessed die (since both describe members of the opposite sex from whom they were separated in the camps). Crude and vivid references to the moment of death are not the intention of memorial poems, but rather Bruck and Levi both imagine an alternative reality in which their loved ones live on. The testimonial poetry, aimed at informing audiences of the reality of the camps, does focus on the degradation and destruction of men, women and children in the camps, as will be discussed in section 1.6.

1.5 The cathartic function of poetry

The memorial poems analysed in the previous section are examples of highly intimate writing, demonstrating the very human loss of those who died in the camps, and the enduring legacy of this bereavement on those who survived. Poetry allowed the writers to create a space for the remembrance of those who perished during the Holocaust, and this memorialising was a vital part of the survivor-writers' post-Auschwitz rehabilitation. This section will focus on a slightly different type of survivor poem, one which carries out a cathartic function, which was also essential to post-Holocaust survivorship.

After the liberation of the camps, many survivors describe a truncated existence, in which they were overwhelmed with horror. W. G. Niederland, a psychoanalyst who had himself fled Nazi Germany, observed and formulated the phenomenon of 'survivor syndrome', after interacting with thousands of patients, including survivors of the Nazi camps, as well as natural disasters such as floods.⁵⁸ 'Survivor syndrome', Niederland writes, is a phenomenon whereby the Holocaust survivor experiences extreme feelings of guilt and the destructive, self-denigratory belief that 'the best had died' in the camps.⁵⁹ Poetry offered survivors a cathartic space in which to tell and retell their past. It is a medium which invites authors to experiment, to write and rewrite and therefore to grapple in a variety of ways with their traumatic experiences.

Dori Laub explores the cathartic, indeed life-saving, nature of self-expression after Auschwitz, observing of the people he interviewed for the Fortunoff Video Archive, '[t]he survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive.'⁶⁰ Similarly, Edith Bruck, in the preface to *Il tatuaggio*, describes the composition of poetry as an 'ancora di salvezza'.⁶¹ Alluding to the cathartic properties of poetry, Bruck states that she writes 'per non soffocare'.⁶² Poetry is presented as an invaluable, even life-saving method of communicating the lived experience. It is an essential vehicle for processing the past and attempting to rebuild a new life after Auschwitz.

This cathartic working through of the past is, by definition, more personal and private than the memorial or informative motive for writing. Catharsis is, in the case of survivor-writing, an effect of the poetry, rather than necessarily the cause. The composition of poetry is itself the cathartic process, offering the

⁵⁸ W. G. Niederland, 'Clinical Observations on the "Survivor Syndrome"', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 49 (1968), 313-315.

⁵⁹ Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, p. 64.

⁶⁰ Dori Laub, 'Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 61-75 (p. 63).

⁶¹ Bruck, *Il tatuaggio*, ix.

⁶² Bruck, *Il tatuaggio*, ix.

survivor a means to express the most intimate emotions about their Auschwitz experiences. Evidence of the efficacy of poetry as a cathartic, restorative tool can be measured in quantitative terms: references to the Holocaust diminish over time in Edith Bruck's poetry collections, in contrast to her prose work, where the Nazi genocide continues to loom large. This disparity between her treatment of the Holocaust in her poetry and prose suggests that she found the former genre more satisfactory for the expression of her thoughts, feelings and memories of the past, while she is still seeking a means of conveying this information via prose.

The composition of literature has a rich and historical association with catharsis, indeed, as Richard Kearney writes, '[f]rom the ancient Greeks to the present day, the healing powers of storytelling have been recognized and even revered.'⁶³ Kearney, whose work also considers catharsis in the context of 'narratives of genocide', although not specifically poetry, acknowledges that '[h]ere one encounters the cogent objection that catharsis is really out of place, since it seeks to appease or resolve in some way the irredeemable horror of evil.'⁶⁴ As Kearney highlights, there is a genuine danger that the cathartic is interpreted as 'appeasement'. This thesis certainly does not advocate this interpretation, and nor do the poems themselves invite such a reading. The cathartic working through of the past in survivor poems is, predominantly, a means of personal redemption, of ensuring continued survival after Auschwitz. That *poetry* specifically met such a need is, I would argue, because the genre 'serves an essential function: to assist in the survival of individuals as they undergo existential crises.'⁶⁵ Gregory Orr views poetry as Kearney views cathartic writing more generally: as a means of surviving. This section will demonstrate how poetry performed a cathartic function for Edith Bruck and Primo Levi as survivors,

⁶³ Richard Kearney, 'Narrative Pain: The Ethics of Catharsis', in *Difficulties of Ethical Life*, ed. by Shannon Sullivan and Dennis J. Schmidt (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 181-194 (p. 181).

⁶⁴ Richard Kearney, 'Narrative Pain', in *Difficulties of Ethical Life*, ed. by Sullivan and Schmidt, pp. 188-9.

⁶⁵ Gregory Orr, *The American Poetry Review*, May-June 2002.

and was adopted not in order to neatly overcome the past, but to process it and its many complex ramifications for post-Holocaust survivorship.

Fundamental to a working through of the past was the process of coming to understand why one had survived. For those who had lost countless friends and family in the camps there was an inevitable (although an unfair) sense of guilt, and a need to ascribe a greater reason for their survival. Scholars have indeed observed that '[t]he meaning-making process serves as the core of the survivorship model.'⁶⁶ Poems offered Primo Levi and Edith Bruck a means of grappling with the nature of their survival, and to assign a meaning to and acknowledge the responsibility of their post-liberation life. This process was not straightforward and neither, therefore, are the resulting poems. The two poems analysed here, Edith Bruck's, 'Perché sarei sopravvissuta?'⁶⁷ and Primo Levi's 'Il superstite',⁶⁸ both demonstrate the survivors' torturous and conflicting emotions about their survival. The poems, particularly Bruck's, appear to cause more distress to the writer than an assuaging of difficult emotions. This does not, however, negate the poem's cathartic function: as has been suggested above, it was the process of writing the poem which was cathartic, allowing the survivors to vocalise paradoxical sensations, and difficult emotions about their Auschwitz legacy and creating a space for these feelings to be voiced and processed, but not necessarily resolved.

Bruck's 'Perché sarei sopravvissuta?' is a poem *about* testifying and about what Bruck sees as her pre-ordained role post-Auschwitz, from which she feels she has no right to deviate. Bruck grapples with her sense of duty and obligation to testify, attempting to appease her own restlessness and dissatisfaction by suggesting (both to herself, and to the reader) that her very survival must be in some way significant. This argument, common amongst survivors, seems to have proved comforting in two vital ways: firstly testimony was seen as a way of

⁶⁶ Roberta R. Greene, Marilyn Armour, Shira Hantman, Sandra A. Graham, 'Conceptualizing a Holocaust Survivorship Model', in *Studies of the Holocaust: Lessons in Survivorship*, ed. by Roberta R. Greene (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 13-29 (p. 17).

⁶⁷ Bruck, *Il tatuaggio*, pp. 68-9.

⁶⁸ Levi, *Ad ora incerta*, p. 76.

honouring, or at least vindicating the dead; and secondly, the notion of having been pre-selected as a testifier both justifies and legitimises survival. Both of these arguments effectively alleviate and absolve the survivor from sensations of 'survivor guilt'. Examples of cathartic survivor-poetry tend to fall into one of two categories: those which have a wider, interpersonal scope and aim to dispel feelings of guilt amongst the survivor community as a whole (for example Levi's 'Il superstite', discussed below) and those which are inherently private and constitute a reflexive self-examination and self-appeasement. 'Perché sarei sopravvissuta?' falls into this latter category: it is essentially a private dramatic monologue, in which she draws both comfort and anguish from her role as testifier. This poem demonstrates how the survivor-writer is indelibly marked by their Holocaust experience, locked in a paradox: the survivors testify to assuage their feelings of guilt about the past and their survival, however testifying entails remembering, and remembering brings back the feelings of guilt. Bruck uses poetry to express this paradox, and to vent her frustration at the resulting feelings of helplessness.

Twice within the thirty-two line poem Bruck poses the rhetorical question 'Perché sarei sopravvissuta?' (l. 1 and l. 16), before suggesting in response that the reason behind her survival is her task of enforced remembrance. Unlike a memorial poem, however, Bruck explicitly states that her function is to remind people not of the dead, but of 'le colpe' (l. 3) of the guilty. It is clear that for Bruck, forgiveness is inconceivable, and indeed remorse amongst the Nazi persecutors merely compounds their guilt rather than reducing the severity of their transgressions.

This poem is forceful and establishes Bruck as a lone justice seeker, facing a world of guilty individuals: this stance can be inferred from her barely veiled accusation, aimed at the reader who is complicit in mankind's dreadful failing of (wilfully) having 'così poca memoria' (l. 15), which she attempts to overcome with this poem and her writing in general. While from the survivor's perspective, and arguably in general, the immediate postwar period saw Europe's attempts to skirt around the monumental tragedy of the Holocaust, it could be posited that

Bruck's aggressive and accusational stance is perhaps a carefully crafted facade which serves to defensively deflect Bruck's own unresolved (and unmerited) feelings of guilt surrounding her survival. A further attempt to appease any such painful feelings is clear in Bruck's description of her campaign for justice, a role which she describes as being her unique cross to bear, referring in three successive lines to her centrality: 'a me' (l. 9), 'con me' (l. 10), 'in me' (l. 11). Though Bruck alone, she suggests, can fulfil her testimonial destiny, she acknowledges that she functions on behalf of the 'sei milioni di morti' she carries with her, who demand her continued dedication to enforcing remembrance.

The necessity of this burden of responsibility is seemingly accepted by Bruck, who writes 'Perché sarei sopravvissuta/ se non per testimoniare' (ll. 16-7): it is, she suggests, a natural reaction. The all-consuming nature of Bruck's self-sacrifice is also underlined by the poet, however, through an anaphorical repetition of her dedication. She testifies:

con la mia vita
con ogni mio gesto
con ogni mia parola
con ogni mio sguardo. (ll. 18-21)

The completeness of her dedication, reinforced through the repetition of 'ogni' in three consecutive lines, is followed by Bruck's third rhetorical question: 'E quando avrà termine/ questa missione?'. This first vocalising of discontent, a challenging of what she has hitherto described as her natural and inevitable role as spokesperson for the dead, uses quasi-religious terminology: 'missione', which, even as she struggles against it, presents her reality as divinely sanctioned, and thus unavoidable. Bruck laments the 'double-edged sword' of the past (ll. 26-7) which condemns her to constantly relive and re-suffer without end. This effort and self-sacrifice is ultimately depicted as worthless by Bruck, given humanity's propensity to forget and repeat the mistakes of the past.

The final four lines of the poem convey a pessimism and the perceived futility of her post-Holocaust identity and role. Bruck speculates on what the culmination

of her efforts will be, and suggests that her legacy will be: 'forse un'eco' (l. 31). The weakness of 'an echo' is further qualified and reduced by the 'perhaps' and Bruck effectively casts doubt upon her ability to leave even the faintest impression upon public consciousness with her life of devoted testimony. Ultimately she suggests that her efforts are in vain, as she establishes in the final line of the poem, which observes the inherent failings of mankind 'che dimentica e continua e ricomincia...' (l. 32). The rhythm of this line – uuxuu^uxu^xuxu begins with predominately unstressed syllables, which forces the emphasis on the final, iambic word of the poem, 'ricomincia'. The polysyndeton has a similar effect, and presents the procession of the three interlinked verbs as natural and inevitable. The final line of the poem, which is deliberately not end-stopped, conveys a circularity to humanity's behaviour, and a tragic failure to learn from the past. Though this poem suggests that Bruck views such a reality as inevitable, she continues to carry out her role as testifier: the only role she can imagine for herself in a post-Holocaust world. Poetry has afforded her the space to convey her complex battle of emotions and offers the potential for a working through of the difficult demands of survivorship. Bruck uses this poem to establish not only the reasons for her survival, but also her response to this responsibility.

In 'Perché sarei sopravvissuta?' Bruck denies those guilty of Holocaust atrocities forgiveness, and also vehemently criticises humanity in general for what she views as a willed lack of memory: an abandonment of the past, which could lead to a similar, endlessly repeating sequence of tragedies in the future. Her accusation and aggression is also, to a more limited extent, aimed at the dead, whose oppressive presence and burden of responsibility she feels, and who, through no fault of their own, have condemned her to a life of eternal remembering and suffering. This poem, as is typical of Bruck, reads like a dramatic monologue; while her other poems, however, have a clearly established imagined interlocutor, 'Perché sarei sopravvissuta?' is addressed to Bruck herself, and is a grappling of her own post-liberation reality. Unable to justify her survival in rational terms, she perceives of an almost divinely proscribed 'missione' which, though she pessimistically suggests may appear ultimately

pointless and self-destructive, she cannot and will not abandon. Though Bruck accuses humanity of its propensity to forget, this poem is her cathartic attempt to overcome such forgetfulness: it is a decisive, empowered decision to challenge mankind.

Bruck may feel the burden of 'sei milioni di morti' (l. 12), but her role as spokeswoman is ultimately self-assigned, although she evidently does not view it in such terms. Testifying, which demands a repeated reliving of the past, prohibits the victim from moving on, and thus Bruck's decision to continue to remember so that the crimes of the past are not forgotten is a voluntary self-condemnation to suffer persistent pain. The tragedy is that even Bruck acknowledges, with her cyclical, pessimistic closing line, such self-sacrifice holds no guarantee of bringing change or renewal to society. Potentially, such efforts could prove wasted and her dedication to re-live and recount could simply represent a conscious decision to condemn herself to live, like Levi, in constant anticipation of the morning cry of 'Wstawać'.⁶⁹ Of course, by using the poem to express her pain and frustration at society's willful oblivion, Bruck is attempting to challenge and overcome it, effectively taking back control and reassigning meaning to her post-Holocaust role as witness.

While Bruck's poem is very direct and personal, the title and repeated questioning of 'perché sarei sopravvissuta?' signalling to the reader the intimate nature of her post-Holocaust processing; Levi's cathartic poem 'Il superstite' is a far less direct engagement, building instead upon a literary allusion which recurs in Levi's writing, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*.⁷⁰

The first thing to mention about 'Il superstite' is the date of composition. Written on 4th February 1984, the poem is one of Levi's latest poetical engagements with the Holocaust. Nearly forty years after his liberation from the camps he returns once again in his literature. This returning, or perhaps, more accurately, the

⁶⁹ See Primo Levi's poem 'Alzarsi', in *Ad ora incerta* (p.16).

⁷⁰ Most notably, Levi uses the untranslated English version of ll. 582-85 as an epigraph in *I sommersi e i salvati*, the same four lines he translates at the start of this poem.

feeling of never having left, is subtly reflected in Levi's choice of the word 'superstiti' rather than 'sopravvissuti' for the title. The former implies continued survivorship, *surviving*; while the latter – a past participle – suggests that survival is a past, complete action.

The poem is written in the third person, and further distancing it from Bruck's style of writing in 'Perché sarei sopravvissuta?', Levi's first five lines directly quote Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 582-85. Line one of 'Il superstite' offers Coleridge's original English, which is then translated and repeated in line two. Levi continues by translating the following three lines, although including an important modification in line four. While Coleridge's original reads 'And till my ghastly tale is told/ This heart within me burns' (ll. 584-5), Levi writes 'E se non trova chi lo ascolti/ Gli brucia in petto il cuore.' (ll. 4-5).⁷¹ Levi's poem, therefore, states that the writing is not sufficient in itself for catharsis, what is vital is finding a listener[/reader] to act as witness to the words.

In the 'Cromo' chapter of *Il sistema periodico*, Levi recounts the ways in which he identifies with the Ancient Mariner, writing:

Le cose viste e sofferte mi bruciavano dentro; mi sentivo più vicino ai morti che ai vivi, e colpevole di essere uomo, perché gli uomini avevano edificato Auschwitz, ed Auschwitz aveva ingoiato milioni di esseri umani, e molti miei amici, ed una donna che mi stava nel cuore.⁷² Mi pareva che mi sarei purificato raccontando, e mi sentivo simile al Vecchio Marinaio di Coleridge, che abbranca in strada i convitati che vanno alla festa per infliggere loro la sua storia di malefici. Scrivevo poesie concise e sanguinose [...] scrivendo trovavo breve pace e mi sentivo ridiventare uomo⁷³

Levi's words here are essential, since they highlight how important the figure of the Ancient Mariner is to Levi. The Ancient Mariner, forced to carry the albatross he killed around his neck, is compelled to tell everyone his story. Levi was driven by the same burning need, and alludes to the cathartic, purifying power of poetry

⁷¹ As identified by Judith Woolf in 'From *If This is a Man* to *The Drowned and the Saved*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi*, ed. by Gordon, pp. 35-50 (p. 39).

⁷² Another reference to the unnamed woman, perhaps the subject of '25 febbraio 1944'.

⁷³ Primo Levi, *Il sistema periodico* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008), p. 155.

which brought temporary alleviation of his suffering, and enacted his post-Auschwitz rehabilitation: effectively poetry allows him to *rifare* himself and rebecome a man. This is the remaking of man on a personal, individual level – the survivor’s own enactment of what writers such as Salvatore Quasimodo and *cantautori* such as Francesco Guccini perceived as art’s duty towards mankind in general, see Chapter 2.

Another enduring and clear parallel drawn between Levi’s poems and the Ancient Mariner is the decision to entitle Levi’s collection of poems ‘Ad ora incerta’, Levi’s translation of Coleridge’s words, present in both English and Italian in ‘Il superstite’. This clearly draws a link between Levi’s entire poetical production and the Mariner’s compulsion to recount his own horrible visions.

Levi may begin ‘Il superstite’ by resting heavily upon Coleridge’s work, but the lines which follow are imbued with Levi’s own memories and suffering. After line five, there are eight lines describing what visions the *superstite* relives, followed by seven lines in which the survivor directly addresses the *compagni* he sees.

‘Compagno’, a term which will be explored in more detail in the next section due to its repeated use in ‘Buna’, initially appears a non-specific term in line six, however it becomes increasingly apparent that Levi is referring to those with whom he suffered the horror of Auschwitz. Pale and ghostly, Levi uses harsh consonants (‘lividi’ (l. 7) and ‘grigi’ (l. 8)), and a largely dactylic falling rhythm to create a heaviness, as if the corpses of the dead were dragging themselves towards the survivor.

The figures are rendered ghostly by conspiring nature and human cruelty: they are pale in first light and the cloud makes their outlines unclear, an effect which is further compounded by the cement dust, and implicitly the cruel enforced manual labour, which makes them appear grey and anonymous. These figures are indistinct, a mass of humanity without faces or names, a terrifying depiction of the millions killed in the camps.

Further contributing to the sense of bulk anonymity, Levi depicts the *compagni* as automata, ceaselessly grinding their teeth in their sleep, chewing the non-existent turnip. Levi thus depicts the dead in a Dantean way, endlessly repeating the same fruitless actions, and never gaining satisfaction: they are eternally burdened with the starvation of Auschwitz.

The poem now passes to the final section, the survivor's direct address to the figures, urging them over the course of six lines to leave him alone in a number of ways: 'Indietro, via di qui' (l. 14), 'Andate' (l. 15), 'Ritornate' (l. 18), all of which are placed at prominent start of line positions. There is a rising hysteria in these final lines, in which the survivor becomes increasingly desperate to defend himself. This is further exaggerated through the punctuation, with full stops creating stilted caesuras within lines 15 and 17, and then the contrasting polysyndeton of the final two lines.

Levi employs another returning trope, the term 'sommersa', which is discussed in section 1.4 above, during the analysis of '25 febbraio 1944'. Here again the term equates Auschwitz with a Hellish underworld, although in this case the 'gente sommersa' (l. 14) are rising up to pursue the survivor. In an attempt to placate these ghostly figures, the survivor begins to justify his survival:

Andate. Non ho soppiantato nessuno,
Non ho usurpato il pane di nessuno,
Nessuno è morto in vece mia. Nessuno. (ll. 15-7)

These lines, each of which contains twelve syllables, all finish with the word 'nessuno', lending a chant-like quality to this section. The survivor begins his appeal for clemency with a euphemism, 'soppiantato', which is vital in this context, since it links in with the spatial connotations of 'sommersa'. The survivor stresses that he is not the reason for the fall of the dead. In line 17 the survivor is explicit in his meaning: he is not responsible for anyone's death. Yet this expression of innocence is not apparently enough to assuage his guilt.

The concluding two lines offer the survivor's final rebuttal, and his desperation is clearly expressed in the polysyndeton, with the conjunction 'e' interspersing every beat of the last, hendecasyllabic line. This frequent use of 'and' in the survivor's ultimate claim of innocence: 'Non è mia colpa se vivo e respiro/ E mangio e bevo e dormo e vesto panni.' (ll. 19-20) means that almost every word of the last line and a half can be elided 'vivo^e respiro^e mangio^e bevo^e dormo^e vesto', creating an accelerating rhythm. Indeed, the penultimate line is dactylic, while the final line, linked with elision and enjambment, is trochaic, speeding up and creating the impression that the survivor is desperate to get his message across before he is subsumed by the *compagni*, the very personification of his survivor guilt.

If we look closely at the survivor's plea in the final lines, however, what becomes clear is how minor the cause for his guilt appears to the reader. The verbs for which he feels the need to justify himself seem trivial outside of the camps: living, breathing, eating, drinking, sleeping, wearing clothes. These verbs are ones we would associate with the most simple survival, yet they lie outside the reach of the *gente sommersa*, as the *superstite* knows. They were alien concepts within Auschwitz, which was built to destroy man. Line 20 is also a direct reference to Dante's *Inferno*, XXXIII, l. 141, as Levi makes explicit in his notes on the poem.⁷⁴ Levi therefore aligns himself as Branca d'Oria who, in Dante's work, is depicted as existing on earth as a sort of automaton, while his soul is condemned to hell.

Like Bruck's poem, 'Il superstite' is not a poem which offers the survivor-writer a neat resolution, indeed the judgement of the dead hangs in the air, as the survivor is offered no reply, the poem ending with his anguished cry of innocence. We do not learn whether the survivor is left in peace, although we suspect not. Like Bruck, the survivor and, of course, the Ancient Mariner with whom Levi so identified, must continue to carry the ghosts of those who were left behind. What the poem offers Levi, however, is a chance to express his

⁷⁴ Levi, *Ad ora incerta*, p. 140.

conflicted feelings of guilt and innocence at some degree of personal distance, by using a classic literary figure.

Writing, Levi asserted, brought him moments of reprieve and this poem, a cathartic expression of the fears, doubt and spectres which haunted the survivor, is a clear poetical example of a survivor grappling with their past. This processing of the past was essential in order to once again become a man who is able to look 'al futuro anziché al passato'.⁷⁵ Another vital means and motivation for rebuilding oneself after Auschwitz was to ensure that such horrors would never be repeated, and to do this Bruck and Levi made recourse to poetry's informative function: testifying, sharing their experiences and acting as witnesses through verse, as shall be discussed below.

1.6 The informative function of poetry

In his poem 'Alzarsi' Primo Levi alludes to the dreams which drove the prisoners onwards in the camps: '[t]ornare; mangiare; raccontare'.⁷⁶ Placed on a par with the need for food, Levi suggests that telling others – informing the world about what they witnessed and suffered – was fundamental to the inmates. Levi began writing his poetry within weeks of returning to Turin, completing the vital trilogy of 'returning, eating, telling'. The driving force to talk about the camps is commonly referred to by survivors, and is, of course, directly discussed in Bruck's 'Perché sarei sopravvissuta?', which was analysed in section 1.5. Testifying and informing were not just for the benefit of the survivor, but also perceived as a duty owed to the dead.

Poetry was an important medium through which Primo Levi and Edith Bruck shared their experiences and informed audiences. They used poetry to convey memories and testimonial content, but also to caution and convey the importance of engaging with the past. In their poems the two survivor-writers relate the horror of the camps and also vociferously counter complacency,

⁷⁵ Levi, *Il sistema periodico*, p. 155.

⁷⁶ Levi, *Ad ora incerta*, p. 16, l. 4.

disinterest and even denial. Three poems will be analysed in this section: Edith Bruck's 'Arrivo'⁷⁷ and Primo Levi's 'Buna'⁷⁸ and 'Shemà'.⁷⁹ These works demonstrate the range of poems aimed at penetrating public consciousness, informing and engaging the reader and prompting reflection.

Communicating the reality of the camps was often the first motivation of the survivor, and this is reflected in Edith Bruck's and Primo Levi's collections of poetry: Bruck's 'Arrivo' and Levi's 'Buna' constitute the survivors' first poetical engagement with the Holocaust. These two poems are directly testimonial in nature, aimed at informing the reader and fulfilling the survivors' need to talk about their experiences. Bruck's 'Arrivo' spells a marked break from the preceding poems in *Il tatuaggio*, which focus on her childhood and the innocence and simplicity of family life. Levi's 'Buna', is dated 28th December 1945, a mere two months after his return to Turin, and before he began to compose the prose account of his experiences, *Se questo è un uomo*.⁸⁰ In his note on the poem, Levi unequivocally ties the poem to his experience during the Holocaust, stating '[Buna è] il nome dello stabilimento in cui ho lavorato durante la prigionia.'⁸¹

Levi's poem is divided into two stanzas, of which only the first initially appears to be truly testimonial in nature. The second stanza seems, superficially, more memorial in its content, however, in reality rather than commemorating a specific individual, Levi depicts the moral and physical degradation of the average inmate, thus presenting an accurate and informative insight into the reality of the camps. Levi's 'Buna' is on all counts a more 'regular' poem than Bruck's. Predominately hendecasyllabic, his lines are largely either end-stopped or punctuated, mostly avoiding enjambment. Demonstrating an adherence to more traditionally rigid poetical forms, a rhyme-scheme can be discerned, particularly

⁷⁷ Bruck, *Il tatuaggio*, p. 13.

⁷⁸ Levi, *Ad ora incerta*, p. 13.

⁷⁹ Levi, *Ad ora incerta*, p. 17, see also the epigram for *Se questo è un uomo*.

⁸⁰ See Thomson, p. 229, in which Thomson identifies the period in which Levi began work on *Se questo è un uomo* as February 1946.

⁸¹ Levi, *Ad ora incerta*, p. 139.

in the first stanza. Bruck's 'Arrivo', by contrast, is metrically irregular, unrhyming and consistently enjambed.

Levi's first stanza begins with the harsh consonance of 'piedi piegati' (l. 1), and the repetition of dactylic feet which evoke drudging and relentless toil. The first four lines of the poem interlink with a chiasmic rhyme scheme, which reinforces the measured and cyclical nature of the inmates' daily routine in the Nazi camps. The use of language such as 'maledetta' (l. 1), as well as Levi's faithful adherence to the hendecasyllabic line creates a Dantean dimension to the poem. This literary allusion is further emphasised by his deliberate poeticising of the call to work, which the reader learns from another, later poem, was simply 'Wstawać'.⁸² In 'Buna', Levi re-imagines the simple and perfunctory dawn siren in more poetic terms, reminiscent of an address to be found in Dante's *Commedia*:

"Voi moltitudine dai visi spenti,
Sull'orrore monotono del fango
È nato un altro giorno di dolore." (ll. 6-8)

Indeed, a degree of literary borrowing is evident: 'visi spenti', for example, appears in the singular form in *Paradiso* XXVI, l. 1. The internal rhyme of 'orrore' and 'dolore' creates a heaviness of despair which recalls Dante's depiction of the damned in *Inferno*, who are too condemned to a 'monotonous' eternity of pain and pointless toil.

While Levi uses language traditionally adopted within Italian literature in order to illustrate the Hellish nature of the camps; Bruck's poem, 'Arrivo', begins with a surprising metaphor. In contrast to Levi's conventional 'moltitudine' (l. 6), Bruck describes a womb which has given birth to 'gemelli a milioni' (l. 2). This phrase, which occupies the entire second line of the poem is composed of two rhythmically symmetrical words, linked by an unstressed conjunction: *uxu u uxu*, this metrical mirroring effectively reiterates the identical nature of the inmates who, bald and emaciated, have lost their distinguishing features.

⁸² See 'Alzarsi' in *Ad ora incerta* (p. 16), l. 4.

The SS in 'Arrivo' are described as an assimilated part of the Nazi machine: 'le sue ruote gonfie di odio e di obbedienza/ urlano ordini.' (ll. 3-4) The relentless assonance of 'odio', 'obbedienza' and 'ordini' drives the verse forward while simultaneously encapsulating the trilogy of values at the core of Nazi ideology. Violence dominates in Bruck's poem, as is evident from line 8, where she discusses the ordered lines of prisoners, 'guadagnata con pugni e calci e colpi di fucile.' This description incorporates polysyndeton, with the effect not only of stressing the variety of modes of violence adopted by the Nazis, but the conjunctions create a trochaic rhythm which imbues the description with a chant-like quality, and thus reiterates the mindless and incessant nature of the violence.

Bruck and Levi both conclude their first testimonial poems by relating the complete breakdown of human functioning. Bruck discusses the way in which the inmates are rendered deaf and dumb by the wind which takes away their powers of communication, replacing them with the smell of burning bodies and ash, which, she writes, falls 'sulle nostre teste calve di colpe non commesse.' (l. 13) The harsh consonance of the repeated 'c' gives Bruck's poem a powerful close. The reader is made to imagine the enforced baldness of the male and female prisoners, a facet which underlines their physical vulnerability, as well as their humiliation. Bruck emphatically places herself amongst the victims, through the use of the first person plural, 'nostre'. This imbues her words with an authenticity and authority: she establishes herself as a survivor who writes of the tragedies of the Holocaust from direct experience.

Levi's focus on the inmates' enforced moral and physical degeneration centres around his depiction of a nameless other, designated the title of 'compagno'. 'Compagno', a term Levi consistently uses in *Se questo è un uomo*, is a particularly significant term within the Lager: the etymology of the term indicates that its literal meaning is 'one with whom I share my bread', which has obvious and deep connotations when one considers the battle against starvation within the camps and the fiercely guarded rations of bread assigned to the prisoners by the Nazis. Levi's imagined interlocutor gradually diminishes from 'compagno stanco' (l. 9)

to 'compagno dolente' (l. 10), 'compagno grigio' (l. 13) to finally 'compagno vuoto che non hai più nome' (l. 15). This empty man, who has lost every semblance of humanity becomes engulfed by the Nazi regime: losing his name and becoming a mere number. To reflect this degeneration, the rhyme scheme begins to break down: the first four lines of the second stanza, like those of the first stanza, present a chiasmic rhyme; the poem continues, however, with no distinguishable rhyme-scheme. Levi's fellow inmate's moral and physical decline is similarly depicted through anaphora and incremental repetitions which emphasise the full loss of humanity:

Compagno vuoto che non hai più nome,
Uomo deserto che non hai più pianto,
Così povero che non hai più male,
Così stanco che non hai più spavento (ll. 15-8).

Levi concludes 'Buna' by imagining himself and the nameless man meeting again 'Lassù nel dolce mondo sotto il sole' (l. 21), using the subjunctive to underline how unlikely such a reunion would be. Indeed, unable to visualise this meeting, Levi closes the poem by posing a question: 'Con quale viso ci staremmo a fronte?' (l. 22). The Nazi camps reduce the prospect of renewal and normal life to a vague possibility, and one which, in 'Buna', Levi barely allows himself to hope for.

Bruck's 'Arrivo' and Levi's 'Buna' successfully convey not only the chaos and mindless violence of the camps, but also the systematic destruction which was a vital facet of the Nazis' 'Final Solution'. The poems effectively recreate the horror of the camps, which was both physical and psychological, and as such they offer a vital testimonial insight into the Holocaust suffering. Since these two poems represent the writers' first poetical renderings of the Lager, they provide the reader with an intimate understanding of the survivor's state of mind in the immediate postwar period.

The more directly comparative analysis of the two poems above allows the stylistic differences between Bruck's and Levi's writing to emerge. What becomes evident is Bruck's tendency to write more direct, intimate and autobiographical

poetry, while Levi, in contrast, has a marked propensity to compose highly literary poetry, littered with biblical and Dantean allusions. The overt literariness of Levi's poem 'Buna', evident in his more structured division into stanzas, use of rhyme and adherence to hendecasyllables, suggests that his poetry is less of an emotionally open engagement with the past. Levi frequently mediates his memories and experiences through literature, often utilising pre-existing language and images to express himself rather than creating his own language of survivorship. This is, to a degree, to be expected, as Paul Fussell asserts:

Strictly speaking, it would seem impossible to write an account of anything without some "literature" leaking in. Probably only a complete illiterate who very seldom heard narrative of any kind could give an "accurate" account of a personal experience.⁸³

The apparent inevitability of literary references and allusions in the work of an educated individual would seem to account for the vastly different degrees of literariness in Bruck and Levi's poems. Levi, a university graduate and alumnus of the *liceo classico*, had been exposed to the great literature of the Italian canon from a young age. Bruck, in contrast, was deported to the camps as young Hungarian girl from a poor, provincial background, and therefore could not be expected to be as equally well-versed in literature. The fact that Bruck moved to Italy in 1954, and adopted Italian as her literary language does little to address this literary imbalance between the two writers: Bruck inevitably encountered Dante and the other Italian greats at a later age, and, crucially, after her Holocaust experience. This lack of literariness does not, I would argue, render Bruck's poetry more "accurate" or effective than Levi's. Indeed, Levi's frequent Dantean allusions can be considered an invaluable tool for the reader. Writing initially for an Italian audience, the incorporation of Dante, for example, provides the reader with a helpful and familiar frame of reference: essentially, Levi was using a vocabulary with which his reader was acquainted, in order to convey a reality beyond their imagination. That is not to say that Bruck's poetry,

⁸³ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 173.

apparently devoid of literary allusions, is less effective than Levi's poetical works; indeed, there is a vividness and directness to her writing which compensates for a lack of recognisable, elucidatory literary parallels. What can be gleaned, through a comparative reading of Levi's and Bruck's poetry, is that the inclusion and exclusion of literature in these informative, testimonial poems, whether conscious or not, is not essential, but merely another tool which facilitates a more complete understanding of the writer's worldview.

The (un)conscious incorporation of literature is not the only implied 'failing' of poetry which aims to inform and convey factual, lived experiences. As Risa Sodi establishes: 'retelling any event, no matter what the author's compunctions toward "facticity," inevitably filters memory through imagination.'⁸⁴ Though Bruck's relative lack of exposure to literature perhaps protects her from claims of 'inaccuracy'; she cannot be defended from the natural, human intrusion of the imagination when communicating an experience. It is difficult to quantify whether literary allusions or imagination have the most impact on the 'facticity' of a testimonial poem, and so one must simply acknowledge the inevitable presence of such factors and consider why a writer might have relied more on one than the other when composing their poetry.

Lawrence Langer discusses the double-edged sword of literariness and imagination, which on the one hand 'eas[e] us into [the survivor's] unfamiliar world through familiar (and hence comforting?) literary devices', thus affording the reader a unique insight into an incomprehensible world; but which also 'portray (and thus refine) reality'.⁸⁵ Langer writes of 'the literary *transforming* the real in a way that obscures even as it seeks to enlighten'.⁸⁶ While this potential danger must be borne in mind, one must also consider the positives associated with literary testimony: the survivor is provided with an outlet for their trauma; a means of communication; and a framework through which they can testify to the outside world coherently and effectively. It is apparent that 'Buna' and

⁸⁴ Sodi, p. 10.

⁸⁵ Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, p. 19.

⁸⁶ Langer, p. 19.

'Arrivo' are successful in their informative intent, notwithstanding the potential interference of literature and imagination. Both present the reader with a strikingly vivid account of the realities of life within the Nazi camps.

Primo Levi's 'Shemà' is exemplary of a complementary strand of informative poetry in which the reader is incited to remember, to actively overcome ignorance and wilful oblivion. This poem, which forms the epigraph of Levi's *Se questo è un uomo*⁸⁷, was composed on 10th January 1946, thus predating his creation of the prose work which would eventually establish him as one of twentieth-century Italy's greatest writers. The poem's title is a Hebrew word, meaning 'listen!' and it is taken, as many of the poem's most vivid lines are, from Deuteronomy 6: 4-10. Levi's poem is, however, a bitterly ironic version of the biblical verses, for, while the latter commands the reader to acknowledge and uphold the sanctity and unity of God; Levi incites the reader to bear witness to the unholy, inhumane reality of the Holocaust. The force of Levi's message is created through the falling, dactylic rhythm of the lines. The poem's cadence becomes chant-like, and this effect is augmented through frequent anaphorical repetitions. The poem is constructed in such a way as to impress upon the reader the importance of Levi's message, and indeed the final three lines of the poem convey a curse to the reader who fails to obey Levi's incitation to understand the gravity of the Holocaust, disseminate the message and prevent a similar disaster from occurring.

'Shemà', as printed in *Ad ora incerta*, is formed of three heterometric stanzas,⁸⁸ which neatly encapsulate Levi's message: the first stanza opens with a resounding 'Voi' (l. 1), an inclusive second-person plural which is imbued with accusatory connotations in this poem, and which will be repeated in the third line of the poem. This first line establishes who exactly Levi intends the recipients of his orders to be, and notably, the address recreates a line in Dante's *Inferno*:

⁸⁷ The poem appears without a title in *Se questo è un uomo*.

⁸⁸ As the epigram for *Se questo è un uomo*, the poem is presented in 4 stanzas, the final 3 lines of the poem are separated from the previous section and aligned with the second stanza.

'Oh voi che sanz'alcuna pena siete'.⁸⁹ In stark contrast to the survivors and victims of the Holocaust, the 'voi' Levi addresses are characterised by connotations of safety, security and indulgence, and are described in the first stanza as enjoying a comfortable lifestyle, surrounded by friends and provided with warm food: a life that the Holocaust survivor could only dream of from within the camps. The second, central stanza is visually distinguished from the first and final stanzas through eisthesis. This stanza presents a description, not of the camps themselves, but of the inmates who have been reduced to degraded, semi-destroyed men and women, and about whose humanity Levi commands the reader to reflect. Products of the Nazi extermination programme: five lines each are dedicated to the male and female victims respectively. Each section of the middle stanza is end-stopped and the concluding lines of the sub-sections form a unifying half-rhyme of 'no' (l. 9) and 'inverno' (l. 14). The five lines which describe the male inmates use anaphora to lend momentum to the descriptive sequence. The lines focus on the actions of the male inmate: brutal, physical behaviours such as working and fighting, which are commonly associated with male strength, power and resilience. Such an image of the male physical dominance of the inmates is, however, overturned by the concluding line of this male-oriented sub-section which underlines the impotency, vulnerability and passivity of the male victims: 'Che muore per un sì o per un no.' (l. 9) This line, a perfect iambic pentameter, breaks with the predominantly dactylic rhythm of 'Shemà', and the intonation, which places both 'sì' and 'no' on an ictus, highlights the arbitrariness of a decision which would, and did, mean life or death to a Jewish inmate.

The second sub-section of the central stanza, which describes the female prisoners, is distinct from the male description, since, rather than centering on physical actions, it focuses on the physical appearances of the women in the camps. Their bald heads and empty eyes are not only diametrically opposed to the Beatrice and Laura of classical Italian poetry, but also to the average and

⁸⁹ See Valeria M. M. Traversi, 'Per dire l'orrore: Primo Levi e Dante', *Dante: rivista internazionale di studi su Dante Alighieri*, 5 (2008), 109-126 (p. 113).

nondescript woman. Their lack of feminine attributes – even their womb is cold and vacant (l. 14) – distinguishes them from womankind, so much so that Levi commands the reader to question their very humanity (l. 10). Again Levi uses anaphora, repeating 'senza' at the start of two consecutive lines (ll. 11-2) in order to explicitly underscore the multitude of attributes the women have lost within the camps. The description of the women, and the second stanza, concludes with a simile which likens the female inmates to 'rane' (l. 14): Levi's most resounding indication of the women's degeneration and loss of humanity within the camps.

The final stanza returns to address the reader, and it is here that the true aim of 'Shemà' becomes apparent. Alluding to Deuteronomy 6: 6-9, Levi commands the reader to move beyond a passive reading of 'Shemà' and into active, collaborative reflection. Levi impels the reader to: 'meditate che questo è stato' (l. 15). The use of the imperative signals the fact that the reader is not granted the right to choose whether or not to participate in this poem's informative aim: engagement is obligatory and 'Shemà' closes with a series of commands which echo the biblical verse and grow in intensity, urgency and aggression. The embedded rhymes in lines 18 and 19: 'stando' and 'andando', and 'coricandovi' and 'alzandovi', create a sense of oppression which reflects Levi's insistence that the tragedy of the male and female victims of the Holocaust should not be forgotten. The final three lines of the poem present a harrowing *volta* in which Levi considers the alternative - the reader who elects not to continue the preventative chain. For such examples of wilful negligence and lack of human compassion, Levi reserves uncharacteristically vehement bile, and issues a curse:

O vi si sfaccia la casa,
La malattia vi impedisca,
I vostri nati torcano il viso da voi. (ll. 21-3)

The final line is marked by the harsh consonance of the repeated 'v' sound: 'vostri', 'viso', and the very final word, which returns the reader back to the beginning of the poem, 'voi'. The concluding 'voi' is stressed, and resonates beyond the poem's close. The emotionally charged nature of Levi's language, and the power of his metrical dexterity serves to emphasise Levi's aim: to penetrate

public stupor and demand recognition of the horrors of the Holocaust. Only through such emphatic vehemence did the poet believe that another, similar human catastrophe could be avoided.

Bruck and Levi composed both poetry and prose, and in line with general readership trends, received their greatest public recognition for their prose works. Yet, despite the fact that their poetry attracted a smaller readership, less critical acclaim and a reduced financial incentive, both writers continued to compose poetry. It is perhaps this smaller readership,⁹⁰ which furnishes the poems with an intimate quality, and renders the two writers' poetry particularly valuable on a testimonial level. This, combined with the inexplicable impulse the survivors describe, contributes to the sensation that these poetical attempts to engage and inform the reader contain precisely what Bruck herself asserts: 'verità assolute'.⁹¹ 'Absolute truths' are, inescapably, a contentious issue. The imperative to testify truthfully, sincerely and authentically is entrenched in the moral demands of post-Holocaust survivorship. The decision to convey such ethically charged testimony through poetry is evidently one which appealed to many survivors: Robert Antelme, who was deported to Buchenwald, corroborates Bruck's argument in support of an inherent truthfulness in poetry. It is, Antelme writes, 'the essence of poetry to express experience, to express reality as it is constantly lived, contested, and assumed. [...] Whether testimony or prophesy, the poetry of the camps has the greatest chance of being the poetry of truth'.⁹²

1.7 Conclusion

In an interview published by Brenda Webster, when asked why she decided to become a writer Edith Bruck replies:

⁹⁰ Ian Thomson's biography indeed suggests that Levi intended his poetry to be circulated exclusively amongst friends, although such professions of modesty have been commonplace amongst writers for centuries, and should not, perhaps, be taken at face value.

⁹¹ Bruck, *Il tatuaggio*, ix.

⁹² Robert Antelme, 'Poetry and the Testimony of the Camps', in *On Robert Antelme's The Human Race*, ed. by Dobbels, trans. by Haight, pp. 31-6 (p. 34).

I didn't decide, life decided. I didn't have the faintest idea... It's hard to say. Certainly this unique experience, this enormous tragedy was a great stimulus whether moral – to witness – or as a kind of pressure to communicate, to exorcize, to vomit a little of the horror.⁹³

In this assessment, Bruck touches on many of the fundamental facets of survivor poetry-writing: it is often described as a driving impulse by survivors, motivated by the need to testify, and composed in order to gain a temporary cathartic alleviation of the trauma of Auschwitz. Poetry also, this chapter has argued, offered a third essential function to survivors: it provided a space for commemorating the dead. This memorial function, along with poetry's cathartic potential and ability to succinctly and effectively convey testimony and inform, made it an essential genre in the post-Auschwitz rehabilitation of Edith Bruck and Primo Levi.

Bruck's poetry is starkly personal and direct, very different in this respect from Levi's highly literary verse. Both styles however offer a valuable outlet for survivor expression, allowing them to perform the post-Holocaust imperatives of remembering, processing and informing. Both survivor-writers published their first collections of poetry in 1975, though the poems themselves often represent their very first literary responses to the trauma of the camps. Written for themselves, as a vital vehicle for expression, as well as for the audiences they wished to inform, warn and even chastise, poetry was an essential part of these survivors' continued negotiation of life after Auschwitz.

Poetry has a long history as a means for expressing traumatic suffering. It holds the potential to be an intense and dynamic mode of writing, with composition imbued with a myriad of authorial decisions. Poetry for the survivors offered a chance to recodify language, creating a new relationship between words and the reality they depict. Simultaneously intensely personal and of universal significance, the seven poems analysed in this chapter, along with many other

⁹³ See Brenda Webster, 'An Interview With Edith Bruck', *13th Moon*, 11:1-2 (1993), 170-75 (pp. 170-1), cited in Balma, *Edith Bruck in the Mirror*, p. 4.

works by Levi, Bruck and other Holocaust survivors, were essential to their post-Auschwitz rehabilitation.

Primo Levi and Edith Bruck both wrote numerous poems about their Holocaust experiences, demonstrating an intentional refusal to forget the past, and their repeated attempts to encourage readers to engage with the enormity of Auschwitz through poetry. The fact that both writers were active translators of poetry is further evidence of their enthusiasm for the genre, and desire to ensure it garnered as large an international audience as possible. It implies their belief in the possibility and value of translating poetry, something which critics question, as shall be discussed in section 3.6.

Poetry offered Levi and Bruck the means to fulfil the post-Holocaust imperatives of survivorship: remembering, processing and informing. It also allowed the creation of a new identity – the literary writer. Composing poetry distinguished Levi and Bruck from other survivors who recorded their experiences in prose, since they were very consciously aligning themselves with a scholarly tradition and the intellectual associations of the poet. Bruck and Levi are writing within an established tradition of poetry about traumatic suffering, yet the uniqueness of their experiences ensures that their work sits within the discrete genre of survivor poetry.

Poetry had a number of appealing features for survivors returning from the camps: it is an established vehicle for mourning and memorialising the dead; its composition can perform a cathartic function, allowing the expression and therefore the (temporary) alleviation of complex and paradoxical emotions; and it allows for the dissemination of information in a concise and evocative presentation for the reader. In addition, essentially for survivors emerging from Auschwitz, poetry is 'inherently connected to memory: an art of recall, it has its origins in mnemonics.'⁹⁴ This vital facet of poetry ensured its success as a readily-

⁹⁴ Matthew Boswell, 'Reading Holocaust Poetry: Genre, Authority and Identification', in *The Future of Memory*, ed. by Richard Crownshaw, Jane Kilby and Antony Rowland (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 165-177 (p. 168).

communicable and therefore easily disseminated vehicle for expression, and as an invaluable tool for the post-Holocaust rehabilitation of these two survivor-writers, Primo Levi and Edith Bruck.

Chapter 2 *RIFARE L'UOMO* AFTER AUSCHWITZ: SALVATORE QUASIMODO AND FRANCESCO GUCCINI

'questa letteratura [...] [h]a rifatto l'uomo, ha restaurata la coscienza'

Francesco De Sanctis¹

2.1 Introduction

Survivors such as Primo Levi and Edith Bruck, whose poetry we discussed in Chapter 1, were not the only individuals drawn to write about the Holocaust, though their motivations were uniquely personal and particular, given their first-hand experience of the tragedy. Many survivor-writers, as we have seen, were writing for memorializing, cathartic and informative functions, and as a means of facilitating their own post-Holocaust rehabilitation. From the late 1940s a wide range of artists in Italy turned to Auschwitz in their work, and many, including the two men discussed in this chapter, hoped that their art would help to rebuild and reshape society for the better after the Nazi atrocity.

This chapter will engage with two poems by Salvatore Quasimodo and two of Francesco Guccini's songs. In so doing, the chapter offers a comparative study not only of two artists, but of two genres: the lyric poem and the *canzone d'autore*, in which these two men excel. Both Quasimodo and Guccini have achieved renown and success in their careers, the former as a Nobel laureate and a canonical figure; the latter a hugely popular cultural icon.² Though the two

¹ Francesco De Sanctis, 'Giuseppe Parini', in *Saggi critici* ed. by Luigi Russo, vol. 3 (Bari: Laterza, 1952), pp. 112-139 (p. 138).

² For further reading on Salvatore Quasimodo and his works, please see: Giulio Vallesse, 'Poesia di Salvatore Quasimodo', *Italica*, 24:3 (1947), 238-243; Luigi Borelli, 'Lettura di Quasimodo', *Italica*, 37:1 (1960), 1-12; Louis R. Rossi, 'Salvatore Quasimodo: A Presentation', *Chicago Review* 14:1 (1960), 1-23; Michele Tondo, *Salvatore Quasimodo* (Milan: Mursia, 1976); Rosa Brambilla (ed.), *Salvatore Quasimodo: l'uomo e il poeta* (Assisi: Cittadella, 1983); Rosalma Salina Borello, *Salvatore Quasimodo: biografia per immagini* (Cavellermaggiore: Gribauda, 1995). The poet's collected works can be found in Salvatore Quasimodo, *Tutte le opere*, 19 vols (Verona: Mondadori, 1965-1972).

There are fewer critical texts on Francesco Guccini, however the following works offer a fascinating insight into the singer and the genre in which he writes: Lorenzo Coveri, *Parole in musica: lingua e poesia nella canzone d'autore italiana* (Novara: Interlinea, 1996); Paolo Jachia,

artists are indubitably writing for different audiences, at different times, and in different ways, this chapter will argue that the way in which they conceive of art's post-Auschwitz imperative (see section 2.4), and their way of enacting this, are strikingly similar.

2.2 Salvatore Quasimodo and Francesco Guccini

Salvatore Quasimodo and Francesco Guccini initially appear to have little in common, aside from their success as writers in their respective fields of poetry and the *canzone d'autore*, genres which will be discussed in greater detail in section 2.3. Quasimodo was born in 1901 and died in 1968, while Guccini was born almost four decades later in 1940. This difference in age and experience during the Second World War is pertinent to their writing on the Holocaust, as will be discussed below. Quasimodo published his first collection of poetry, *Acque e terre*, in 1930, and his writing was hermetic in style and focused on his birth-place of Sicily and the sensations of loss, anguish and pain he felt on his physical separation from the island. Quasimodo's hermetic style continued in his following publication, *Oboe sommerso* (1932) and is notable until the publication in 1946 of *Giorno dopo giorno*, which represents a shift in Quasimodo's writing after World War Two towards increased social engagement, and away from hermeticism. Quasimodo received the ultimate accolade in 1959 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, for 'lyric poetry, which with classical fire explores the tragic experience of life in our own time.'³ Quasimodo's poetry after the Second World War demonstrates precisely this desire to explore and engage

Francesco Guccini: *40 anni di storie, romanzi e canzoni* (Rome: Riunti, 2002); Michele Antonellini, *Non solo canzonette: Temi e protagonisti della canzone d'autore italiana* (Foggia: Bastogi, 2002); Marco Santoro, 'What is a "cantautore?" Distinction and authorship in Italian (popular) music', *Poetics*, 30 (2002), 111-132; Marco Santoro, 'The Tenco effect: Suicide, San Remo, and the social construction of the canzone d'autore', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 11:3 (2006), 342-66; Roberto Agostini, 'The Italian "Canzone" and the Sanremo Festival: Change and Continuity in Italian Mainstream Pop of the 1960s', *Popular Music*, 26:3 (2007), 389-408 and Centro Studi Fabrizio De André, *Il suono e l'inchiostro: Cantautori, saggisti, poeti a confronto* (Milan: Chiarelettere, 2009).

³ https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1959/ [accessed 27 March 2018].

with the tragedy of humanity, and the Holocaust is a topic to which he returns on a number of occasions, as we shall discuss below.

Francesco Guccini's first album, *Folk beat n. 1*, was released in 1967 and contained the song 'Auschwitz', a piece which focused on the horrors of the Holocaust, over twenty years after the liberation of the camps. Like Quasimodo's postwar writing, Guccini demonstrates an engagement to inform his audience and draw attention to the events of the past in order to inform and drive social change. While Guccini's career began just a year before Quasimodo's death in 1968, and his writing on the Holocaust is inevitably composed from a later perspective, Guccini as a singer-songwriter and Quasimodo as a lyric poet both have successful careers spanning a number of decades, and both demonstrate the same dedication to reflect and comment on the social changes taking place over the period in which they were writing. Given the prevalent view of the Holocaust as a defining tragedy of the twentieth-century, and its direct impact on Italy, it is unsurprising that both artists should address the atrocity in their work.

2.3 Poetry and the *canzone d'autore*

Though poetry and song bear a common ancestry, some modern scholarship has tended to avoid comparative studies of the two genres, designating to poetry an elite, high literary status, and dismissing song as 'childish [...] products of a mass market geared to the lowering of consciousness',⁴ and, as such, unworthy of intellectual engagement. The *canzone d'autore*, however, defies such pigeonholing, and belongs to a rather blurry category between what are now considered the distinct realms of poetry and song. Indeed, over the last ten years academics such as Marco Santoro and various *cantautori*,⁵ including the 'professore', Roberto Vecchioni, have sought to bring the musical genre into the

⁴ Marcella Filippa, 'Popular Song and Musical Cultures', in *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. by David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 327-343, (p. 328).

⁵ The performer of a *canzone d'autore*, a neologism which can be thought of as something like "song author", a title imbued with rather more literary status than "singer-songwriter".

academic domain. Their approach has been to justify the *canzone d'autore's* presence in scholarly work by highlighting its links to poetry.⁶ Robert Gordon alludes to this facet of the *canzone d'autore*, describing it as 'the newly alternative, youth-centred 'poetry' of popular song'.⁷ In an exploration which, like this thesis, places Quasimodo's work alongside Guccini's, Gordon avoids simply equating the *canzone d'autore* with poetry, and instead stresses the distinction between the two forms. His comparison between Guccini's 'Auschwitz' and Quasimodo's poem of the same name implicitly perpetuates the perceived disparity between poetry as 'high' art and song as a lesser art form. He writes:

[s]ome of these elements [in Guccini's song] are shared by Quasimodo's poem: despite the latter's origin in a *high* classical and hermetic tradition of lyric poetry, both evoke at several points similar imagery of cold, snow or rain, wind, smoke, silence and death.⁸

Gordon's words imply surprise at the similarities between 'Auschwitz' the song and 'Auschwitz' the poem: this thesis will suggest that such parallels are to be expected in the post-Holocaust era. This work draws out the inherent equivalencies between poetry and the *canzone d'autore*, while maintaining, like Gordon, not only the formal distinctions between the genres, but also the different demands and expectations. The *cantautori* themselves stress the divide between their own work and poetry, with Francesco De Gregori unequivocally stating, '[n]on sopporto chi dice che la canzone è poesia.'⁹ Other *cantautori*, including Guccini himself, support De Gregori's assertion: a position which seems to stem not from self-deprecation, but from a desire for the uniqueness of their works to be recognised.

⁶ Roberto Vecchioni's text, *Parole e canzoni* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), is a collection of the *cantautore's* songs and poems, and includes the singer's comments on each song, as well as essays and interviews which discuss, amongst other things, Vecchioni's work 'in rapporto alla letteratura', <http://www.vecchioni.org/editoria/parole-e-canzoni/> [accessed 5 September 2014].

⁷ Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture*, p. 123.

⁸ Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture*, p. 124, (my emphasis).

⁹ Jachia, p. 150.

To simply read a *canzone d'autore* as poetry is potentially reductive, since it detracts from the genre's specificity and overlooks its strength as an art form. Gianni Guastella writes:

quelle canzoni cui si riconosce il possesso di caratteristiche formali e stilistiche particolarmente "alte" devono essere ridotte a semplici *testi* per diventare compatibili con le forme tipiche della poesia libresca. Peraltro, paradossalmente, una volta assunta questa forma, è difficile che testi del genere mostrino di possedere la complessità e le qualità polisemiche che sono tipiche della grande produzione poetica contemporanea; una produzione che, per generare i propri effetti letterari più peculiari, molto si affida all'altissimo grado di sofisticazione e di *lentezza* che solo la *lettura* di versi scritti può consentire¹⁰

Guastella introduces some fundamental ideas in his argument, which will guide this chapter's comparative reading of Guccini's work alongside Quasimodo's. Traditional poetry is written to be *read slowly*, to be engaged with fully and to be afforded care and attention, particularly in Italy, where, as Edward Williamson wrote, 'poetry has continued a purely literary, "aulic" language to a degree unthinkable in English poetry.'¹¹ Williamson was writing in 1952, in the very years in which Quasimodo was engaging with the Holocaust in his work. Though the critic's assertion is not necessarily representative of the current status of Italian poetry, it is evident, then and now, that songs are driven by other imperatives: to be received aurally, and thus to be absorbed and assimilated quickly and efficiently. As Roberto Vecchioni writes: 'la canzone è un'opera di qualche minuto: chi ascolta deve, appena finita, poter tirare le fila dei vari "significanti" e trovarne soddisfazione; non è concessa l'incomprensione'.¹² While this immediacy is fundamental to a song's success, it is clear that the *canzone d'autore* functions slightly differently. Indeed, its American equivalent, the

¹⁰ Gianni Guastella, 'Introduzione', in *Il suono e l'inchiostro*, ed. by the Centro Studi Fabrizio De André, p. 11.

¹¹ Williamson elaborates further, 'This continuation was aided by the tastes of the public for whom poetry was written; the classical education prepared a group of readers with highly sharpened perceptions, who preferred subtle rearrangements of established elements.' Edward Williamson, 'Contemporary Italian Poetry', *Poetry*, 79:4 (1952), 233-244 (p. 244).

¹² Roberto Vecchioni, 'La parola tra canzone d'autore e poesia', in *Parole in musica: lingua e poesia nella canzone d'autore italiana*, ed. by Lorenzo Coveri (Novara: Interlinea, 1996), pp. 9-12 (pp. 11-12).

protest song, and arguably its most famous proponent, Bob Dylan, have been the subject of exclusively *textual* analysis, which has claimed, as A. Day writes, that ‘the words are not merely a part but the *central* part of a multi-dimensional art’.¹³

Day’s assertion, which places the song’s text centre stage, is countered by numerous critics and musicologists who argue against the possibility of fruitfully analysing musical texts. Chris Kennett writes:

The temporal, demographic, attentive, local and task-related particulars of the listening situation all conspire to dilute the analytical meanings of the well-parsed text to such an extent that the absolute sound recordings ceases to exist as an object of analysis; all that remains is personalized meaning, personalized using, and personalized listening – *personal text*, in fact.¹⁴

Kennett’s argument, that analysing the meaning of songs is inherently problematic since it reduces the lyrics to ‘personal text’, actually supports the approach adopted in this thesis. Since any reading of prose, poetry – indeed any engagement with any art form – is unavoidably personal, the analysis presented in this chapter of two of Guccini’s songs, ‘Auschwitz’ and ‘Lager’ is, by definition, an analysis of a personal text, the only valid interaction, as Kennett suggests, with songs and their lyrics. Since, as Day argues, there is merit in textually analysing Dylan’s songs, a textual analysis of *canzoni d’autore* must be considered similarly valid, since the genre can be considered a direct offshoot of the American’s dynamic style.

Consciously established in the early 1960s as an antidote to the *canzonetta*,¹⁵ the *canzone d’autore* was the Italian recording industry’s answer to the socially engaged song writing which was emerging around the globe, and which was epitomised by songs such as Bob Dylan’s ‘Blowin’ in the wind’ (on *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, (Columbia, 1963)). Like Dylan’s own *oeuvre*, the *canzone*

¹³ See A. Day, *Jokerman: Reading the Lyrics of Bob Dylan* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 5 (my emphasis).

¹⁴ Chris Kennett, ‘Is anybody listening?’, in *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. by Allan F. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 196-217 (pp. 207-8).

¹⁵ A term alluding to a simpler, often more lighthearted song: similar to pop music. A diminutive of ‘canzone’ (‘song’), the term has a slightly pejorative, dismissive dimension.

d'autore straddles the divide between the Beat poets and the folk protest tradition.¹⁶ The term 'cantautore' entered the Italian lexicon in 1960, appearing in the recording company RCA's catalogue.¹⁷ Its meaning soon evolved from singer/songwriter, to take on a more complex set of connotations: by the mid-1960s, as Santoro observes, *cantautore* had come to mean 'the singer and the songwriter of a *different* song – something that by its very distinguished existence could redefine (and circumscribe) the boundaries of "commercial" or a more obviously "light" music.'¹⁸ The *canzone d'autore*, an offshoot of the protest song genre, was set up in opposition to the *canzonetta*, which had been an immensely popular, escapist genre during the Second World War, focusing on love and carefree living.¹⁹ The *canzone d'autore* broached new themes, such as the 'absurdities of war and power' and 'deviant and marginal people'.²⁰ Themes which, as Guccini's oeuvre demonstrates, extended to include the Holocaust. Not only did these new *cantautori*, such as Domenico Modugno, Fabrizio De Andrè and Luigi Tenco, whose suicide during the 1967 Sanremo festival catapulted the *canzone d'autore* into wider public awareness, write about different topics, they also wrote in an altogether different way, focusing on creating works which make demands of the listener, rather than simply providing an easy-listening soundtrack to life. Rachel Haworth observes:

We must concentrate as we listen to this new song form, which in turn requires us to possess and use this skill in order to fully appreciate it. [...] [T]he *canzone d'autore* should not be used as background music whilst we are doing something else: this new genre of song demands interest, concentration and ultimately respect.²¹

¹⁶ A significant nod to Guccini's own artistic leanings can be found in the title of his first album: 'Folk Beat no. 1'. For a further discussion of Bob Dylan's influence on Guccini, please see Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture*, p. 124.

¹⁷ Santoro, 'What is a "cantautore?"', p. 114.

¹⁸ Santoro, 'What is a "cantautore?"', p. 116.

¹⁹ Marcella Filippa, 'Popular Song and Musical Cultures', in *Italian Cultural Studies*, ed. by Forgacs and Lumley, p. 328.

²⁰ Marco Santoro and Marco Solaroli, 'Authors and Rappers: Italian Hip Hop and the Shifting Boundaries of *Canzone d'Autore*', *Popular Music*, 26:3 (2007), 463-488 (p. 466).

²¹ Rachel Haworth, 'Authenticity, Authority and Influence: From the *chanson française* to the *canzone d'autore* in the 1960s and 1970s' (unpublished doctoral thesis: The University of Leeds, 2010), p. 164. See also Rachel Haworth, *From the Chanson Française to the Canzone d'autore in the 1960s and 1970s: Authenticity, Authority, Influence* (London: Routledge, 2016).

The audience of the *canzone d'autore*, therefore, just like the reader of poetry, expects, anticipates and looks for challenging complexity – indeed, it is a fundamental facet of the genre. For this reason, the two works of Francesco Guccini offer a valuable and pertinent counterpoint to two of Salvatore Quasimodo's poems, and for this reason, too, these two genres are genres *par excellence* for the enactment of art's post-Auschwitz duty to inform, enlighten and encourage a personal engagement with the events of the past. The key to poetry's and the *canzone d'autore*'s particular success in enacting art's post-Auschwitz duty is their mnemonic nature, and the fact that both genres are collaborative: challenging, stimulating and ultimately constructing meaning with the reader.

The *cantautore*'s aim, in contrast to the singer of a *canzonetta*, is as Michele Antonellini writes, 'rimanere nel tempo. *Non specchio dei tempi, ma specchio della vita*'.²² An aim which seems remarkably similar to poetry's traditional function: to endure, and to convey 'universal truths'.²³ Yet, like poetry, the *canzone d'autore* goes beyond a reflection of life: it holds the capacity to *change* life, to focus on issues and problems, and to challenge and change society. Inspired as it was by American protest songs and a perceived need to revolutionise the music industry, the *canzone d'autore* offered a new form of engaged music, meant to 'far pensare, oltre che di intrattenere',²⁴ and thus successfully achieved a poetical status. Indeed, it is a genre for which Vecchioni was short-listed for the Nobel Prize in Literature, a clear indication of its assimilation into the literary world.²⁵ In 2016 Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for 'having created new *poetic* expressions within the great

²² Antonellini, p. 15, my emphasis.

²³ Bruck, *Il tatuaggio*, ix.

²⁴ Antonellini, p. 15.

²⁵ See, for example, Ilaria Betti, 'Nobel per la letteratura 2013, Roberto Vecchioni, Bob Dylan e Leonard Cohen candidate come cantautori', *L'Huffington Post*, 20 September 2013, online at http://www.huffingtonpost.it/2013/09/20/nobel-letteratura-2013_n_3960011.html [accessed 11 November 2014].

American song tradition'.²⁶ Nominating and awarding the Nobel Prize in Literature to singer-songwriters demonstrates that:

La canzone non più come poesia di serie B, ma come una diversa forma di espressione letteraria. La candidatura [...] riporta poesia e musica sullo stesso livello. Sono altro e hanno pari dignità.²⁷

Poetry and the *canzone d'autore* are just that: different but equally worthy of respect. This chapter, therefore, conducts a comparative study of Quasimodo's poetry and Guccini's songs as different, but complementary works: both worthy of critical attention, and both important forms for exploring the artists' perceived duty to educate and shape society after Auschwitz.

Though, for the reasons outlined above, the *canzone d'autore* can be considered an equivalent genre to poetry, and a form which stands up to textual scrutiny, this chapter acknowledges the point stressed by Guccini himself:

è difficile che la canzone possa essere esaminata solo come testo poetico: la canzone è più complessa, ha la musica, deve essere ascoltata, cantata, [...] è anche il teatro, il movimento, nonché l'atmosfera creata dal pubblico²⁸

While the genre can withstand solely textual analysis, this does not do full justice to the multifaceted nature of these works. For this reason, the analysis in this chapter will engage with Guccini's songs as poetical works, while taking into consideration their extra-textual components, such as musical accompaniments, instrumental interludes, delivery etc. While one must always remain wary of taking an artist at his own words, the *cantautore's* admission can be considered a crucial insight into how his works should be approached: Guccini asserts 'a me,

²⁶ https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2016/dylan-facts.html [accessed 27 March 2018, my emphasis].

²⁷ Andrea Laffranchi, 'Dylan, Cohen e... Vecchioni Se il Nobel va a un cantautore', *Corriere della Sera*, 20 September 2013, p. 61.
http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2013/settembre/20/Dylan_Cohen_Vecchioni_Nobel_cantautore_co_0_20130920_d49131b2-21b9-11e3-985a-abb2403463de.shtml [accessed 27 June 2014].

²⁸ 'Il dizionario delle cose perdute e altro... Intervista a Francesco Guccini'
<http://www.francescoguccini.net/rassegna-stampa-web/754-il-dizionario-delle-cose-perdute-e-altro-intervista-a-francesco-guccini> [accessed 27 June 2014].

in effetti, interessa molto più quello che dico e con che parole lo dico di quanto mi interessi il supporto musicale'.²⁹ Guccini's statement suggests that his own focus is primarily on the words: on what he says and how. The music is complementary, and has a supporting, subsidiary role. This approach shall be our own, in analysing Guccini's two Holocaust works.

2.4 Remaking man

Thus far, we have established why a comparative study of poetry alongside the *canzone d'autore* is both interesting and valuable. These complementary genres inform one another and offer a stimulating insight into modern trends of poetical engagement with Auschwitz. The decision to conduct a comparative study of precisely Salvatore Quasimodo and Francesco Guccini is similarly interesting, since they both display in their work the same inherent belief in poetical art's capacity to positively shape the world, and 'rifare l'uomo': a commitment to re-evoking the dead, and positively rebuilding humanity and society after Auschwitz. Both men are, crucially, writing within a tradition which affords them both the authority, and the opportunity to do so.

Salvatore Quasimodo and Francesco Guccini had well-known precedents for their works: poetry has been used to report on war and violence for millennia, and World War One saw the genre flourish as a form of literary expression amongst soldiers and survivors; Guccini's own work follows in Bob Dylan's footsteps, and belongs to a field of socially engaged song writing, which was emerging in the early 1960s.³⁰ The novel nature of Quasimodo's and Guccini's

²⁹ Jachia, p. 125.

³⁰ For two excellent introductions to war poetry, please see Winn, *The Poetry of War*, and Jon Stallworthy, *Survivors' Songs: From Maldom to the Somme* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Jon Stallworthy's edited volume, *The Oxford Book of War Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) is a comprehensive collection of war poems dating from 900BC to contemporary writers. For a collection of poems specific to the First and Second World Wars, please see Michael Foss (ed.), *Poetry of the World Wars* (London: Michael O'Mara, 2013). For further reading on Bob Dylan and protest songs, please see *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan*, ed. by Kevin J. H. Dettmar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); the incredibly wide-ranging volume, *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music*, ed. by Jonathan C. Friedman (New York: Routledge, 2013), and *Music and Protest in 1968*, ed. by Beate Kutschke and Barley Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

'Auschwitz' works is not, therefore, based upon a lack of historical models for testimonial poetical forms, but on their decision to specifically broach the Holocaust in a country struggling to come to terms with its wartime history, to a defined and substantial audience. The novelty of the two artists' work is not simply the fact that it was written, but that it was guaranteed a reception.

Quasimodo, a writer who would go on to receive the Nobel Prize for literature in 1959, was already an established poet when he began writing his socially engaged poems such as 'Il mio paese è l'Italia' in the mid-1940s. He had already become a canonical figure, and his works benefitted from an associated gravitas and influence. Francesco Guccini, conversely, composed 'Auschwitz' at the start of his career; the song itself becoming an iconic part of his success. He was writing, however, after Luigi Tenco's suicide at the San Remo music festival: a pivotal moment in Italy's twentieth-century music history, which cemented the status of the *cantautori* as figures for change and social progress. The *canzone d'autore* had, by the 1960s, attained a reputation for authenticity, and a powerful and growing following.³¹ In other words, Salvatore Quasimodo and Francesco Guccini were writing from a favourable position which enabled them to fully explore and actively engage with art's imperative after Auschwitz.

The two men wrote not as survivor witnesses, but as artists, in an acknowledgement of the necessity for art to engage with the Lager. In 1968 Primo Levi would assert that 'after Auschwitz it is barbaric to write poetry except about Auschwitz',³² and Guccini's and Quasimodo's decisions to compose works entitled precisely 'Auschwitz' demonstrate their public acceptance, from the very earliest postwar period in Quasimodo's case, of art's perceived testimonial debt. Their Holocaust works adhere to Wilfred Owen's rather prescient statement in 1918 that '[a]ll a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true Poets must be

³¹ For a thorough exploration of the *canzone d'autore* and authenticity, please see Haworth, *From the Chanson Française to the Canzone d'autore*. For further information on the growth of the *canzone d'autore*, please see Agostini, pp. 389-408.

³² Rudolf, 'Primo Levi in London (1986)', in *Primo Levi, The Voice of Memory*, ed. by Belpoliti and Gordon, (p.28).

truthful.³³ The notion of the poet as a figure of truth, guidance, warning, can be clearly perceived in both Quasimodo's and Guccini's compositions about the genocide: their works implicitly, and in places explicitly, refer to art's potential to change society, to stimulate discussion and reflection.

Quasimodo's acknowledgement of his testimonial responsibility as one of Italy's leading poets came very soon after the liberation of the camps. In his essay 'Poesia contemporanea' (1946), he writes: 'Il poeta [...] partecipa alla formazione di una società, anzi è "individualità necessaria" in questa formazione',³⁴ Quasimodo elaborates on the indispensable figure of the poet in society:

Oggi, poi, dopo due guerre nelle quali l'"eroe" è diventato un numero sterminato di morti, l'impegno del poeta è ancora più grave, perché deve "rifare" l'uomo, [...] quest'uomo che giustifica il male come una necessità, un bisogno al quale non ci si può sottrarre, [...] quest'uomo che aspetta il perdono evangelico tenendo in tasca le mani sporche di sangue.

Rifare l'uomo: questo il problema capitale. [...] Rifare l'uomo, questo è l'impegno.³⁵

Clearly alluding to the Holocaust in this essay, Quasimodo establishes the poet as fundamental to man's post-Auschwitz recovery. His use of the term 'uomo' firmly places Quasimodo in a tradition of writing about the Holocaust which questions the nature of man and mankind, most notably present in Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo*, which was written in the same years. Yet, for Quasimodo, a clear distinction must also be drawn between mankind in general, which needs to be remade, and the poet who attains an almost deified status, re-making man in his own image. The poet, in Quasimodo's depiction, holds the key to man's redemption.

³³ Wilfred Owen, *The Complete Poems and Fragments*, ed. by Jon Stallworthy (London: Chatto & Windus, 1983), p. 192. See also <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/education/tutorials/intro/owen/preface.html> [accessed 7 September 2014].

³⁴ Salvatore Quasimodo, 'Poesia contemporanea' (1946), in *Il poeta e il politico e altri saggi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1967), pp. 13-24 (pp. 17-8).

³⁵ Quasimodo, 'Poesia contemporanea', pp. 23-4.

Quasimodo's decision to use the term 'uomo', rather than, say 'umanità', is not without its issues: on the one hand, the poet could be said to be using the term in a universal sense, as an all-encompassing reference to mankind; on the other, 'uomo' excludes the millions of women and children who also suffered at the hands of the Nazis, and whose own contributions to rebuilding the post-Auschwitz world must not be overlooked.³⁶ Yet, it must also be acknowledged that Quasimodo's pronounced commitment to 'remake man' was written at a time when the majority of poets and critics were indeed men: given this historical context, this gendered language is perhaps to be expected.

The poet's choice of the very word 'rifare' is also significant, since it simultaneously refers to the living men who perpetrated the atrocities, and those who were the victims of such acts. 'Undone' indeed has a particular significance in Italian poetry, calling to mind the celebrated lines from Dante's *Inferno*, 'non avrei creduto/ che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta' (*Inferno*, III, 56-7). It is fitting that Quasimodo's postwar assessment of mankind should echo these verses of the *Grande Poeta*, as he surveys the lost souls in the entrance of Hell. Quasimodo, like the *trecento* poet, sees verse as a means of remaking man, as a vehicle for the improvement of mankind. Quasimodo's writing has the capacity to not only morally and spiritually rebuild those whose lives were touched by the genocide, but also to give a form of physical presence to those who lost their lives in the camps.

Quasimodo's discussion of the need to 'rifare l'uomo' has more recent roots than Dante, and indeed we find the same phrase in Benedetto Croce's essay 'Troppo filosofia', written in 1922. Croce asserts that:

I più alti critici di poesia ammoniscono, in questo caso, di non ricorrere a ricette letterarie, ma, com'essi dicono, di "rifare l'uomo". Rifatto l'uomo,

³⁶ For a discussion of how the Holocaust affected the lives of two women, both directly and indirectly and across the generations, please see Bethany Marston, 'Daughters of the Holocaust: Edith Bruck and Helga Schneider' (unpublished undergraduate dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2011).

rinfrescato lo spirito, sorta una nuova vita di affetti, da essa sorgerà, se sorgerà, una nuova poesia.³⁷

Croce, writing before Auschwitz, views the remaking of man as a necessary process for the renovation of literature. Quasimodo, whose essay is written with full knowledge of the atrocities of the Second World War, views literature, indeed specifically poetry, as the means to remake man, commenting: 'la letteratura "si riflette", mentre la *poesia* "si fa".'³⁸ Quasimodo's view of poetry's active duty in the post-Holocaust world provides an essential insight into his motivation for writing 'Il mio paese è l'Italia' and 'Auschwitz', and informs our analysis of these two poems. Quasimodo's commitment to change after the Second World War is not only evident in his poetical shift away from hermetic poetry to realist, socially engaged poetry, demonstrating the belief that 'the escape into the ivory tower of Hermetism, [...] was no longer morally justified'³⁹ – but also in his political allegiance in the postwar period. Quasimodo joined the PCI in 1945, a party whose policies 'were rooted in the politics of the anti-Fascist Resistance of 1943-1945',⁴⁰ a party, in other words, which offered the potential to rebuild a new Italy, in marked contrast to the country's fascist past.

Guccini's own desire to 'rifare' mankind is notable on both the micro and macro scale in his works. Commentators have discussed the way in which Guccini begins many of his concerts with an elegiac song, dedicated to a friend.⁴¹ 'In morte di S. F', also known as 'Canzone per un'amica' (1967) and 'Auschwitz' demonstrate Guccini's belief in the *canzone d'autore's* capacity to 're-evoke' the dead. The very nature of the *canzone d'autore*, like Quasimodo's view of poetry, calls for active engagement: a call which receives a physical and vocal response from the

³⁷ Benedetto Croce, 'Troppa filosofia' (1922), in *Cultura e vita morale: Intermezzi polemici* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1993), pp. 229-233 (p. 232).

³⁸ Salvatore Quasimodo, 'Discorso sulla poesia' (1953), in *Il poeta e il politico e altri saggi*, pp. 34-47 (p. 38), my emphasis.

³⁹ Joseph Rossi, 'Tradition and Innovation in the Occidental Lyric of the Last Decade III: Italian Lyric Poetry of the Fifties', *Books Abroad*, 35:2 (1961), 109-115 (p. 111).

⁴⁰ Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture*, p. 20.

⁴¹ Antonellini, p. 124.

fans at Guccini's concerts.⁴² Guccini's 'Auschwitz' and 'Lager' are written more than a decade apart, which itself demonstrates the *cantautore's* continued desire to remake man: both through memorialising the dead, and by encouraging the moral improvement of his listeners.

These two distinct elements involved in *rifacendo l'uomo* after Auschwitz: reforming the living and giving form to the dead necessitate different forms of writing from Quasimodo and Guccini, which will now be discussed, through an in-depth analysis of their Holocaust works.

2.5 Salvatore Quasimodo, 'Il mio paese è l'Italia'

The four texts in this chapter will be analysed in chronological order, in order to present how art's engagement with the Holocaust has evolved over the decades since the liberation of the camps. The first work to be analysed is, therefore, Quasimodo's 'Il mio paese è l'Italia', one of a number of poems written between 1946 and 1948 and published in *La vita non è sogno*, a collection whose very name communicates Quasimodo's desire to confront the reader with the disturbing reality of the recent past, as well as his own shift from hermeticism to socialism – marking his commitment to look outwards and actively contribute to the rebuilding of the post-Auschwitz world. The poet presents his view of postwar poetry in 1946, writing '[i]o non credo alla poesia come "consolazione" ma come moto a operare in una certa direzione in seno alla vita, cioè "dentro" l'uomo.'⁴³ Poetry is not, in Quasimodo's view, meant to comfort humanity, but to stimulate change at the very core of man: it is the poet's duty to bring about this change after Auschwitz.

This poem displays Quasimodo self-image as a poet, and expresses precisely what he considers to be the poet's imperative: to remember and thus to restore the dead. Poets are described in this work as uniquely able to recall the past and

⁴² For an example of the overwhelming audience participation during a live performance of 'Auschwitz' in 2009, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvbENDy7Z_g [accessed 7 October 2014].

⁴³ Quasimodo, 'Poesia contemporanea', in *Il poeta e il politico e altri saggi*, p. 18.

ensure remembrance. This poem demonstrates Quasimodo subtly justifying not only his vocation, but his right to discuss the Holocaust. He depicts poets as imbued with the sensitivity, moral insight and drive to improve society. It is significant that this dimension was absent from his hermetic writing before the conclusion of the Second World War, which displayed his strong, regional affiliations with Sicily, and the influence of the great poets of antiquity. The proliferation of mythology and natural imagery in his previous poetry is evident in the titles of his collected poems, which include: *Acque e terre* (1930) and *Erato e Apollion* (1936). After the liberation of the camps, such models were no longer appropriate: Quasimodo had come to the realisation that 'a poet could no longer concern himself with idyllic verse and lyric enigmas.'⁴⁴ Quasimodo's desire, therefore, to remake man began with the conscious remaking of himself as a poet, the realignment of his poetical vision, and the conscious effort to ensure his poetry performed a valid social function in the world after Auschwitz.

It may seem in this poem that Quasimodo takes as a given his capacity to fulfil his self-ascribed duties. But the fact that he subtly justifies and clarifies his poetical endeavour and his discussion of the camps in this poem demonstrates insecurity, and a need to pre-empt and counter criticism. Quasimodo begins his poem with anaphora, repeating 'più' twice in as many lines: 'Più i giorni s'allontanano dispersi/ e più ritornano nel cuore dei poeti.' (ll. 1-2). This repetition helps to create a dichotomy between the passing of time, with days fading away; and the poet's ability to recall, which he claims becomes ever sharper as the past recedes. Quasimodo expresses the keenness with which the writers feel their historical imperative, by claiming that the past is lodged in the 'hearts' of poets. This further reiterates the distinction Quasimodo draws in his prose writing between the poets, whose role it is to enact change; and the rest of man, who must be brought to embrace this change. Line one is enjambed, while line two is end-stopped, thus a discrete sense unit is formed, in which the poet makes this grandiose statement. By referring simply to 'giorni', rather than

⁴⁴ Luciano Rebay (ed.), *Introduction to Italian Poetry: A Dual-Language Book* (New York: Dover, 1991), p. 142.

specific events, Quasimodo seems to suggest that poets somehow have the ability to recall and represent all of history. Given this presumed ability, and the corresponding responsibility, an added significance is therefore conferred to the precise part of history the poet chooses to recall and represent.

Quasimodo was very vocal in expressing his belief that the poet had a social responsibility. Indeed, he throws down the gauntlet in his essay, 'Poesia contemporanea' (1946), writing:

Per quelli che credono alla poesia come a un gioco letterario, che considerano ancora il poeta un estraneo alla vita, uno che sale di notte le scalette della sua torre per speculare il cosmo, diciamo che il tempo delle "speculazioni" è finito.⁴⁵

Poetry, he states, is not a game, nor is the poet a dreamy figure on the peripheries of society: he is central to the recreation of mankind in the post-Holocaust period. For this reason, in 'Il mio paese è l'Italia', Quasimodo turns his self-professed poetical mnemonic abilities to the atrocities of the Second World War.

Quasimodo consistently introduces the places and moments in history to which he refers, with the word 'là' (l. 3, l. 10, l. 11) as if to emphasise how remote these realities, and even the memories of these events, seem to the non-poet. He writes: 'Là i campi di Polonia, la piana di Kutno' (l. 3), playing on the homonymical nature of 'campi' to create an ambiguity between a tranquil, natural environment of fields and plains, and a far more sinister description of concentration camps and battlegrounds. This double meaning and wordplay confronts the reader with their own ingrained assumptions, borne out of the notoriety of the Holocaust. To a certain extent, innocence has been lost in countries such as Poland, and the word 'campi' used in this context involuntarily brings Auschwitz to the reader's mind, since the Holocaust dominates the public perception of the countries involved (whether actively or passively) in the Nazi extermination process.

⁴⁵ Quasimodo, 'Poesia contemporanea', in *Il poeta e il politico e altri saggi*, p. 8.

The poet continues to draw a dichotomy between locations of genocide and natural environments. Thus he describes 'colline di cadaveri' (l. 4), the harsh assonance of the repeated 'c' sound is further emphasised by the rhythm of this fourth line: uuux uuux uuux uu, which includes three paeons in fourth position, creating a rising rhythm which accelerates and builds as the horror is explained in the following lines. Quasimodo's selection of the word 'colline' to describe the piles of bodies must not be overlooked, since it qualifies the 'piana' in line three. To use the word 'hills', a term which typically describes a natural landscape, juxtaposes nature and the unnatural once again, and also shows how the Holocaust fundamentally pollutes and alters the natural environment. Hills of corpses modify and dominate the flat plains: they are an aberration. Quasimodo continues the harsh assonance and the distortion of nature in the following line, where he depicts 'nuvole di nafta', the hard 'n' sound driving the verse onwards. Just like the landscape he depicts in 'Auschwitz' (see section 2.6), a suffocating cloud smothers the environment, bringing death and destruction.

The sixth line unequivocally links this poem to the Holocaust, by referring to the primary victims: Quasimodo describes 'i reticolati/ per la quarantena d'Israele' (ll. 5-6). This controversial language, an allusion to the Nazi mentality, depicts the barbed wire compounds as isolation units designed to quarantine the Jews. The rhythmical units 'quarantena' and 'd'Israele' (xuxu, xuxu) are equally weighted, creating the impression that the two terms are a set unit, which fit naturally together. The trochaic nature of these words creates a falling rhythm, further reinforcing this sensation of a natural, inevitable unity between the two terms. The overall effect is a harrowing echo of the horribly effective Nazi propaganda machine, which sought to render the unthinkable palatable, even natural.

The following lines bombard the reader with horrifying images of the Holocaust, a literary manifestation of Quasimodo's belief that to 'remake man', poetry must confront rather than console the reader:

il sangue tra i rifiuti, l'esantema torrido,
le catene di poveri già morti da gran tempo
e fulminati sulle fosse aperte dalle loro mani (ll. 7-9)

Asyndeton and direct language imbue these lines with a harrowing quality. Each image builds upon the last to create intense snapshots of suffering which are indelibly burnt on the reader's consciousness. There is a sacrilegious and barbaric quality to these images, which epitomises the Holocaust's extreme atrociousness. The total absence of human compassion is evident in the humiliating treatment of the dead who remain chained eternally in the graves they dug themselves.

Quasimodo does not allow the reader time to fully process these images, as his poem drives relentlessly onwards, with nineteen lines delivered in a single stanza. The next location presented to the reader is 'Buchenwald, la mite selva di faggi' (l. 10). Once again, nature and the unnatural are juxtaposed with bitter irony, however in this instance, Quasimodo draws out a pre-existing irony: the deceptive name of the camp, which translates as 'beech forest'. His addition of the qualifying 'mite', heightens the sense of incongruity, and contrasts with 'maledetti' in the following line. The two terms are reminiscent of the very extremes of Dante's journey into the afterlife. Just as quickly as Quasimodo introduces Buchenwald, he calls Stalingrad and Minsk to mind, and the connotations of death and destruction with which each is associated. Finally, in line thirteen, the poet allows the reader a brief pause, with the self-contained statement: 'I poeti non dimenticano.' The respite is all too brief, however, and the rhythm of the line drives the reader onwards, as the pace accelerates, beginning with three trochees, and closing with a paeon in first position (xuxuxuxuuu). Placing this end-stopped assertion in the middle of a stanza paradoxically draws attention to Quasimodo's statement, whilst simultaneously hurrying over it in a way which reflects Quasimodo's desire to highlight the poet's fundamental centrality to the process of remaking man post-Auschwitz, and the imperative to ensure that ego does not obscure his moral and ethical duty to record and commemorate. It is striking, considering that this poem was written so soon after the liberation of the camps, that Quasimodo talks of 'forgetting'. Such a pointed reference appears to be a subtle criticism of Europe's wilful ignorance, and refusal to acknowledge the full extent of the Holocaust's ongoing

repercussions, something which Edith Bruck openly criticizes in 'Perché sarei sopravvissuta?' (section 1.5). It is the duty of the poets, Quasimodo implicitly states here, to reject this trend, and defend, protect and strengthen the memorial process.

The poet's capacity to remember is all-encompassing: 'la folla dei vili/ dei vinti dei perdonati dalla misericordia!' (ll. 13-4). The biblical language and the rhythm of the three groups echoes the words of prayer, with the 'vili', 'vinti' and 'perdonati' taking the place of 'Padre' 'Figlio' and 'Spirito Santo': the Nazis' attempts to achieve omnipotence resulting in the ultimate destruction of man. To witness all of this, is the poet. 'Tutto si travolge ma i morti non si vendono.' (l. 15), writes Quasimodo, as if to highlight the poet's fundamental role in avenging the dead: a show of solidarity which ensures their truth will not be 'swept away', and that they too can be remade through poetry.

The tone and focus shift in the final four lines of the poem:

Il mio paese è l'Italia, o nemico più straniero,
e io canto il suo popolo e anche il pianto
coperto dal rumore del suo mare,
il limpido lutto delle madri, canto la sua vita. (ll. 16-9)

Here Quasimodo moves to discuss his homeland, dexterously conflating the peninsula with the horrors which he has consistently described as being 'là', elsewhere. Italy might be his nation, but it is simultaneously 'the most foreign of enemies' (l. 16). This poem, he reveals, has been the story of the Holocaust, of the extremes of war, and it is the story of his country. The song he sings is the plaintive cry of his people. This anguished cry, this 'mothers' grief' (l. 19) – a sound associated closely with war – is also the sound of Italy's life. It is the sound of a life that must be remade, and rebuilt upon an acknowledgement, enforced by the poet, of the past.

'Il mio paese è l'Italia' is a particularly dense poem, which requires multiple readings to untangle the web of images and references. It is also a highly vivid poem, which presents the reader with a clear picture of the horror of the Lager

and the unforgettable brutality of war. Its message is that the poet's work offers the public a vehicle for remembrance, and Quasimodo repeatedly affirms his genre's unique capacity for testimony. The poet critiques society's readiness to forget and presents the poetical antidote. The poem not only promotes the remaking of man, but actively facilitates it: this poem demands engagement and intellectual effort from the reader. Engaging with the poetry inherently promotes an engagement with the subject of the poem, and therefore an engagement with the past. Quasimodo confronts the reader, incessantly bombarding them with vivid images of violence, subjecting them in a small way to a re-enactment of the suffering of the victims. This poem makes for uncomfortable reading, since the 'là' of the violence is brought home to Italy: Quasimodo does not allow for a compartmentalising of the past but enforces an acknowledgement of Italian complicity.

The confrontational approach of 'Il mio paese è l'italia' is clearly aimed at bringing about an open acknowledgement of the past, a fundamental prerequisite for the remaking of man. It is telling, however, that this poem was written before Quasimodo's 'Auschwitz', and yet it is the latter poem which is considered the watershed work. Evidence for 'Auschwitz's' wider reception and recognition can be found in its inclusion in collections of poems such as Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum's own collection, *The Auschwitz Poems: An Anthology*, edited by Adam A. Zych, and in the response of critics such as Robert Gordon, who writes:

Quasimodo's 'Auschwitz' represents something of a watershed: it is perhaps the first major instance of a work in Italian of detached, high-literary, nontestimonial figuration of the Holocaust, with the site of Auschwitz as its emblem and the Jews as its central victims.⁴⁶

Overshadowed by 'Auschwitz' we can infer that in the immediate postwar years Quasimodo's readership may have been relatively unresponsive to the confrontational approach of 'Il mio paese è l'italia', and looked for a more persuasive, entreating invitation to engage with Auschwitz. True to his driving

⁴⁶ Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture*, pp. 118-9.

desire to remake man, Quasimodo was to publish such a work, just four years later.

2.6 Salvatore Quasimodo, 'Auschwitz'

'L'uomo', writes Quasimodo in 1946, 'vuole la verità dalla poesia, quella verità che egli non ha il potere di esprimere e nella quale si riconosce.'⁴⁷ Poetry, he suggests, should be a truthful mirror presenting an accurate depiction in which the reader can recognise themselves, though they may not have the strength to face their own guilt or complicity. 'Auschwitz' demonstrates the poet's return to the recent genocide, and a new, gentler approach, which encourages the reader to reflect and engage with the past.

As this chapter has discussed, 'Auschwitz' is not the first Italian poem about the Holocaust, it is not, indeed, Quasimodo's first: it is simply the first to be widely received as such. By entitling the work simply 'Auschwitz', Quasimodo makes his subject explicitly clear, establishing from the first that incomprehension and disengagement will not be permissible in this poetical exploration of the past. Subtlety is dispensed with, and Quasimodo's clear desire to bring the Holocaust firmly back into public consciousness is arguably what makes this poem the first of its kind in Italy. The writer uses this platform to continue his poetical endeavour to remake man, by forcing him to confront the crimes of the past and move forward in a new, positive way. This imperative is evident in the structuring of the poem, which moves from the general to the specific and then demands a response.

This work consists of four heterometric stanzas, and uses these structural divisions to house four sections which, though disparate in tone and content, ultimately combine to fortify the poem's core message. Confusion, created through ambiguous language, ever-shifting imagery and spatial and temporal reference points, pervades and is notable even in the very first word of the poem.

⁴⁷ Salvatore Quasimodo, 'L'uomo e la poesia' (1946), in *Il poeta e il politico e altri saggi*, pp. 25-29 (p. 28).

'Auschwitz' begins 'Laggiù, ad Auschwitz, lontano dalla Vistola' (l. 1), which, though superficially seeming to offer clarification in the form of three explicatory clauses, in fact raises a number of questions, such as the perspective from which Quasimodo is composing this work: Auschwitz is certainly not 'below' Italy. Nor can 'laggiù' refer to Auschwitz's relative location to the Vistula, since this river runs vertically through Poland and is thus both above and below the camp. Quasimodo does not offer any geographical explanation for his use of 'laggiù', and so the reader is left to look for more abstract reasons to explain this incongruous term. The first line of the third stanza offers an insight, referring to Auschwitz as 'inferno'. Quasimodo certainly implies throughout the poem that the atrocities committed within the camp represent humanity's most profound moral and spiritual depths, reminiscent of, and surpassing even the most terrible crimes committed by the sinners *laggiù* in Dante's depiction of Hell. The falling rhythm of the first line, kickstarted by the trochees within the first two feet, further corroborate this hypothesis, creating the sensation of being dragged downwards into a place where nothing natural can thrive.

Quasimodo consistently juxtaposes Auschwitz and nature in this first stanza, and begins this pattern in the first line of the poem, by locating the camp 'lontano dalla Vistola' (l. 1), a reference which implies not only geographical distance, but also a dichotomy between the river which brings life to the land, and Auschwitz, which brings only death and corruption. The Lager is a 'campo di morte' (l. 3), within the 'pianura nordica' (l. 2), a description which plays on the homonymical nature of the word 'campo': Auschwitz is simultaneously a 'death camp', and a 'field of death', surrounded and therefore thrown into sharper relief, by the verdant Nordic plains. Auschwitz, Quasimodo suggests, is the destruction of nature, just as it is the destruction of man. *Rifare l'uomo* requires the world to be *rifatto*, however man must first acknowledge the destruction it has caused. The hostile environment of genocide is effectively conveyed through Quasimodo's language: the harsh assonance of the repeated 'f' sound in: 'fredda, funebre' (l. 3), and the heaviness caused by the density of double letters:

'pioggia', 'ruggine' (l. 4), 'ferro' (l. 5), 'uccelli' (l. 6), which decelerate the reader and add weight and emphasis to the lines.

The first stanza depicts Auschwitz as a hostile environment, where the wet and cold join forces to dominate and destroy: signs of natural life are conspicuous in their absence. Line six of the poem encapsulates this bleakness: 'e non albero o uccelli nell'aria grigia', the anapaestic rhythm in the line creates a sombre cadence, and the elision which links the 'albero^o^uccelli' to form a fluid pentasyllabic utterance, both unites the trees and birds in their absence and, by increasing the pace, also creates the impression that nature has fled from the abomination Auschwitz. Even the compound which blights the landscape is in a state of decay: Quasimodo describes rusted posts (l. 4) and tangles of wire (l. 5), as if the very structure of the camp is deteriorating in protest against the Nazi crimes committed within.

The strange sensation within the first stanza, a gloomy heaviness, is created in part by the remarkable absence of verbs. The effect is a hypotactic sentence, stretching over nine lines, which presents a number of images: each overlaying the previous without indicating their relative significance. By omitting verbs almost entirely from the first stanza, Quasimodo also conveys an unbearable inactivity, a lack of life and movement. Indeed, the only verb in the stanza is 'lascia', which is inherently the antithesis of action. Auschwitz is, therefore, a truly dead place, where those captive are constrained by their own 'inerzia/ e dolore' (ll. 8-9), which in turn fades to silence.

So alien a concept is natural life within the camps that it cannot even be summoned 'dal nostro pensiero' (l. 7). This reference to an implied 'we' locates the poetic voice within the poem, and establishes a relationship with the imagined interlocutor, 'amore', briefly referred to in line two. The use of the first person also informs the reader that this poem is written from the perspective of the survivor, or the surviving: from both within and beyond Auschwitz. It is difficult to establish precisely where and when the poem is set, since the absence

of verbs effectively removes such clues and creates ambiguities which run throughout this poem.

The second stanza returns to the figure of the 'amore', beginning 'tu non vuoi elegie, idilli' (l. 10). This statement, which could seem ironic in the context of a literary poem, can also be considered an explicit statement of the poet's intentions: not to create a redemptive, aesthetic work, but poetry with a purpose. Quasimodo, writing in 1953, states '[i]l poeta sa, oggi, che non può scrivere idilli o oroscopi lirici'⁴⁸ and nor do the dead he seeks to rebuild in his verse demand such things, but rather 'solo/ ragioni della nostra sorte' (ll. 10-11). Questioning, demanding a reason - though no morally satisfactory explanation can exist for Auschwitz - invites a reflection and a commitment to ensure future atrocities are not committed. By rebuilding the dead, Quasimodo forces the living reader to confront the consequences of past actions, an acknowledgement which leads to the remaking of the living man.

A surprising hypothesis is made in this second stanza: that in this very epicentre of death, there is 'una presenza/ chiara della vita' (ll. 13-14). Line fourteen rhythmically evokes this surging of life: 'chiara della vita.^E la vita^è qui', which can be metrically annotated as follows: xuuu xuu xu x. The feet grow smaller, beginning with a paeon in first position, followed by a dactyl, a trochee and finally a single stressed syllable: 'qui'. The rhythm drives the reader onwards to the remarkable assertion that life is in Auschwitz, a place so terrible that both angels and monsters weep (l. 16). By forcefully asserting the presence of life in the camp, Quasimodo forces the reader to approach the following stanzas and the descriptions of suffering therein with the full awareness that such crimes were committed to sentient, human beings who fought to survive. The 'qui' is also ambiguous in the context of *rifacendo l'uomo*, referring both to the victims alive in Auschwitz, and the murdered brought to life in the poem.

⁴⁸ Quasimodo, 'Discorso sulla poesia', in *Il poeta e il politico e altri saggi*, p. 41.

Quasimodo's verse becomes increasingly dense as he consciously conflates present, future; here and there: 'qui udremo [...] / le nostre ore future / battere l'al di là, che è qui'. Here 'al di là' puns on its homophonical nature: suggesting both 'beyond [Auschwitz]' and the afterlife. The implication is that Auschwitz holds the inmates' futures, and paradoxically both a life beyond the camp, and even death and the afterlife are intrinsically confined to the Lager. The complex tangle of places and times build towards and are retrospectively clarified by the end of the stanza, and the mythological reference which awaits the reader in line twenty-six. A translator of Classical verse, Quasimodo makes reference to two figures who feature in the mythological heritage of his birthplace, Sicily: Alpheus and Arethusa. This unhappy tale tells of Alpheus' relentless pursuit of the nymph Arethusa, and her attempts to flee his unwanted attention, by turning first into a cloud and then into a stream. The myth culminates in Alpheus' enforced victory: he directs his waters through the sea to engulf Arethusa. Arethusa is ultimately overpowered against her will, having struggled until the end. This is the only outcome of the 'metamorfosi' and 'miti' (l. 21) in Auschwitz, and indeed Quasimodo highlights this fact by contaminating the classical myth with the earthly reality of the camp, writing: 'si mutò in fumo d'ombra / il caro corpo d'Alfeo e d'Aretusa!' (ll. 25-26), the smoke of the camps obscuring the clear water of Alpheus and Arethusa, a reference which, like 'Il mio paese è l'Italia', brings the violence of the Holocaust to Italy.

The smoke of Auschwitz is indeed all pervading, emitted in a constant flow from the 'inferno' (l. 27) of the camp. It cannot corrupt the bitter words emblazoned across the camp's entrance, however, which remain obstinately white, as if perversely strengthened by the hostile environment: eternal like the words which confront sinners at the entrance of Dante's Hell. These cruel words, which shine like a beacon through the dark smoke and ash, are the only things which thrive in this world, a constant reminder to the inmates and the post-Auschwitz world of the Nazi attempts to psychologically and physically destroy the lives of millions. They are words which must remain as a reminder of the past, and yet must be overcome for man to be remade.

This third stanza is written in the past tense, relating the horrors committed in Auschwitz from beyond the camps, with an omniscient vantage point. While the verbs are in the past tense, there is a sense of an eternal present, which is further reinforced by the rhythms within the text: 'uscì continuo[^]il fumo', for example, is an iambic tetrameter with an unstressed hyperbeat, which creates a rising rhythm which evokes the smoke unceasingly rising from the chimneys. To reduce all the prisoners to smoke and ash was the ultimate aim of the Nazis; however Quasimodo here exploits the enduring stigma associated with violence against women, and thus further accentuates the horror of the violent acts by depicting the victims as exclusively female.

uscì di continuo il fumo
di migliaia di donne spinte fuori
all'alba dai canili contro il muro
del tiro a segno o soffocate urlando
misericordia all'acqua con la bocca
di scheletro sotto le docce a gas. (ll. 29-34)

These lines of brutality are not punctuated, but run on in one enjambed mass of violent images. The various methods of murder are presented relentlessly, without allowing the reader time to fully acknowledge the enormity of the women's suffering. The victims, amongst whom we can infer that the interlocutor in the poem is numbered, are no longer individuals, but a single entity to be eradicated. The women are dehumanised not only by the inhumane treatment they receive, but also by the description of their barracks as 'canili' (l. 31). The women, whose pleas for 'misericordia' (l. 33) go unheeded, arrive at their fate already skeletal: the finality of death is presented as a mere formality, and one executed without mercy.

A single soldier, representative of the perpetrators in general, is addressed in the following lines: 'le troverai tu, soldato, nella tua/ storia in forme di fiumi' (ll. 35-36), making reference once more to the myth of Alpheus and Arethusa. The soldier is cast as Alpheus, relentlessly and remorselessly pursuing the women in the camp; however, within Auschwitz it is not the women's love the Nazi Alpheus seeks, but their death. Unlike Arethusa, however, the women in the Lager have

not been granted an opportunity to hide and evade their fate: the only metamorphosis in Auschwitz is from life to death; from a living woman into ash and smoke. Since the Lager is an all-consuming Hell, even the soldier, the poet suggests, may have succumbed and metamorphosed into 'cenere d'Auschwitz' (l. 37). The death of the perpetrator is not depicted as a just punishment meted out to a murderer, however, but as the soldier's last service. Death represents for the Nazi the 'medaglia di silenzio' (l. 38), contributing to the ultimate aim of ensuring no one would remember or reveal the true fate of the victims. Quasimodo's remaking of the dead therefore extends beyond the victims, to include the perpetrators themselves. By rebuilding them in his verse, Quasimodo rejects the Nazi desire for silence: he actively seeks out and presents the traces of inhumanity the Nazis had hoped to hide from the world.

Besides the ash and smoke, Quasimodo discusses the physical remains left by Auschwitz, relics of a time of horror: proof which defies silence. The sheer volume and scale of such remnants reiterates the numbers of those who lost their lives in the camps: the plaits are described as 'lunghe' (l. 39); the small shoes cast 'ombre infinite' (l. 41). The juxtaposition, in lines forty-one and forty-two, of two quotidian images: children's shoes and prayer shawls, conveys the fact that the murder at Auschwitz was indiscriminate, not just the women referred to above, but children, men, the elderly. This is further reinforced by the internal rhyme and enjambment which unites the two images: 'piccole scarpe/[[^]]e di sciarpe d'ebrei', and the elision, which creates a falling dactylic rhythm. These items are now history, exhibits which, Quasimodo writes, recall:

un tempo di saggezza, di sapienza
dell'uomo che si fa misura d'armi,
sono i miti, le nostre metamorfosi. (ll. 43-45)

The relics are from a past era, better than our post-Auschwitz present; however, they also offer the potential for our own metamorphosis into a better future.

This is the meaning Quasimodo conveys in the final, short stanza, and his true message in 'Auschwitz'. The camp remains a place where 'amore e pianto/

marcirano' (ll. 46-7), a place where humanity is putrified; however now, after Auschwitz, it is not the 'pioggia' but 'pietà' (l. 47) which stirs up 'un no dentro di noi' (l. 48). This sign of hope, that empathy can stir rebellion and thus end the corruption of the camps, is made more explicit in the final lines of the poem:

un no alla morte, morta ad Auschwitz,
per non ripetere, da quella buca
di cenere, la morte. (ll. 49-51)

Auschwitz, the field of death, has in turn destroyed its own capacity to kill. Death has died at Auschwitz: or rather, confronted with the death of too many, mankind must ensure that such killing will happen no more. By rebuilding the victims, along with the paraphernalia of their daily life, Quasimodo confronts the reader with the physical reality of the millions killed: a stark realisation intended to stimulate the rebuilding of living man in the post-Holocaust world.

2.7 Francesco Guccini, 'Auschwitz'

Francesco Guccini's 'Auschwitz', or 'bambino nel vento' as it is also known,⁴⁹ has achieved considerable and enduring success, as evidenced by its prominent position on the 2006 *Platinum Collection* of Guccini's songs.⁵⁰ As one of the songs which launched his career as a *cantautore*, 'Auschwitz' first appeared in 1967 on the album *Folk Beat n. 1*. Although more than twenty years had passed since the liberation of the concentration camps, the Holocaust was an increasing source of fascination within Italy in the 1960s and 1970s, as indeed was the case across Europe and America. Guccini's 'Auschwitz' can be considered as both a cultural and temporal midway point between literary, and testimonial texts such as Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* (1947); and television series such as NBC's 'Holocaust' (1978): Levi's work, on the one hand, is a sober, direct testimonial account of his experience in the Lager, while NBC's depiction of the Holocaust is a highly fictionalised, unrealistic account which oversimplifies reality in order to render it

⁴⁹ Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture*, p. 124.

⁵⁰ 'Auschwitz' is the third track on a three CD album of forty-seven of Guccini's best loved works.

palatable to wide audiences. Distasteful though NBC's 'Holocaust' might be considered, it had the significant virtue of bringing Auschwitz into the forefront of popular consciousness. Guccini's song strikes a balance between the intellectual and the Hollywood: it is accessible and engaging but intends to inform, rather than comfort the listener. Guccini may not have been breaking new ground with the content of 'Auschwitz', however this work, like Quasimodo's poem of the same name, is a watershed work, since it represents the first Italian song about the Holocaust to achieve significant commercial success - Guccini's biography states that it was this song with which the singer 'entra nella storia della musica italiana dalla porta principale.'⁵¹ A close analysis of Guccini's 'Auschwitz' will allow us to identify the stylistic and formal decisions taken by the *cantautore* in his poetical engagement with the camps, as well as his perception and enactment of art's imperative to remake man after the Holocaust.

For a non-Italian speaker, encountering 'Auschwitz' for the first time via the radio, it would be difficult to deduce the tragic subject matter of the song. The tuneful opening, and melodic guitar chords do little to convey the atrocity of the camps, and Guccini's soft singing style further adds to the sensation of safety and comfort evoked by this song. However, for an Italian speaker, this gentleness takes on a haunting quality, as the innocence of the song's child protagonist is harshly juxtaposed by the manmade cruelty inflicted on him. It is striking that, in Guccini's first poetical engagement with the camps, it is not the poet-writer, but a child victim who calls for the remaking of man. There is, however, at several points in the song, a blurring between the 'bambino' and Guccini. It is significant, for example that Guccini should choose a child victim as the speaker in his song, since he was himself born in 1940, the 'bambino' could, under different circumstances, have been Guccini himself. As the *cantautore*, Guccini both writes and delivers his lines, and so it is natural that the 'io' of the child, sung by Guccini,

⁵¹ <http://www.concerto.net/guccini/biography.htm> [accessed 7 September 2014].

leads to a conflation between the two figures: the imagined victim and the real singer combining to strengthen the song's call for change.

The song's interaction with the Holocaust past is delivered across seven verses, of which six are formed of five lines, and the seventh and final verse is a direct repetition of the penultimate, with the addition of an extra concluding repeated line. Central to the song is the symbolic wind, which acts not only as a driving rhyme ('vento') in the song, but also represents the powerful force of nature, which whips the ashes of the Holocaust victims hither and thither in the air; as well as the cruel extremes of human behaviour, which led to such deaths in the first place. The 'vento' also functions as a direct allusion to Bob Dylan's song, 'Blowin' in the Wind', which also focuses on man's capacity for violence, and calls for an end to such cruelty.

The first line of the song reveals Guccini's desire to present a hard-hitting message with 'Auschwitz', to confront society with its wartime past, and call for change. The song commences in the first person, with the striking words 'son morto', which simultaneously form the statement 'I am dead' and the descriptive 'I died'. Since the act of singing allows the cantautore to control the delivery of his own words, patterns of spoken intonation can be overruled: in this case, 'son morto', which would normally adhere to the following rhythmic pattern, uxu, becomes a molossus, three stressed syllables, which impresses the gravity of the words on the listener, and makes for a memorable opening line. Guccini's decision to begin the song in this way immediately sets this *canzone d'autore* in opposition to the *canzonetta*: demonstrating the *cantautore's* commitment to engage with difficult topics, and his social *impegno*.

The singer qualifies this opening with 'con altri cento' (l.1), which succinctly conveys the extent of the violence in Auschwitz, by depicting the sheer number of murders carried out simultaneously. The revelation that 'io' is a child comes in the second line of the song: 'son morto ch'ero bambino'. Repeating 'son morto' reinforces the finality of the Holocaust brutality, while the elision of 'che' and 'ero' glibly presents the ease with which a child's life was snuffed out in the

eponymous Lager. The singer-songwriter's decision to compose this song from a child's perspective adds emotional intensity and gravitas to his message, since murdered children remain, in the post-Holocaust world, the ultimate symbol of injustice and barbarity.

This first verse adheres to a very regular and familiar rhyme-scheme of A-B-B-A-A. The enclosing rhyme (with the fifth line functioning, as it does in all of the verses, as a reinforcing repetition), renders each verse a self-contained unit, which contributes to the song's clear progression and facilitates audience comprehension. As songwriter and singer, Guccini has full control over the delivery of his song, and within 'Auschwitz' he sings each line with a caesura, effectively creating two hemistichs within which to build meaning. In the first verse, the octosyllabic lines are arranged in such a way as to have three syllables which establish the main message of the line, and then a caesura followed by five syllables which offer clarification. The reassuring regularity of the form is fundamental to the song's success: songs rely on being readily assimilable in order to stimulate recognition and repetition. This accessible regularity also ensures the focus is placed firmly on *what* is said, forcing the audience's attention on Auschwitz.

Guccini consistently uses simple language in 'Auschwitz' which has a dual function: reiterating the child-like nature of the imagined speaker and allowing the gravity and horror of the Holocaust to emerge, unobscured, to the audience. An example of this open language can be found in the rhyming arc of lines two and three: 'son morto ch'ero bambino/passato per il camino'. 'bambino' and 'camino' form an aurally pleasing rhyming couplet: only after closer inspection does the listener comprehend the horrendous reason for the pairing of 'child' and '[crematorium] chimney', which is, of course, the child's murder. The very natural audio matching of this rhyming couplet, and their calm delivery by Guccini, belies their unnatural and barbaric sense connection, and Guccini's style invites the listener to look beyond the apparent simplicity, and engage with the subtext of violence and genocide: to actively participate in the remaking of living man, as well as the remaking of the dead child victim. Behind Guccini's seemingly

straightforward images there are numerous literary and cultural allusions, and his song builds upon the wider corpus of Holocaust responses with which the engaged reader of the time was likely to have been familiar. Lines two and three, for example, allude to a testimony written by Mauthausen survivor, Vincenzo Pappalettera, entitled *Tu passerai per il camino*, which Guccini had read just a few years before he composed this song.⁵²

The second verse introduces the focal location of the song: Auschwitz. As is so often the case in post-Holocaust discussion, 'Auschwitz' should be understood here as an example of synecdoche: while it may be the geographical location Guccini had in mind, his song discusses the general horror of Nazi violence across the various Lager, and is not confined to the specific camp. This verse continues the octosyllabic rhythm of the first verse, though the rhyme scheme varies. 'Vento' remains the key rhyming word in the verse, however its corresponding rhyme, in this case 'lento', concludes the second line, which gives an A-B-C-B-B rhyme scheme, rather than verse one's more singsongy A-B-B-A-A form.

The lyrics in verse two epitomise the tension in Guccini's 'Auschwitz' between an implicit desire to confront the listener with the true horror of the Holocaust, and the *cantautore's* aim to move beyond simple sermonising, to encourage the listener's own processing of the past, achieved through an intellectual engagement with the latent subtext of the lyrics. The lyrics in this verse could refer to a tourist's experience of a luxury winter retreat: snow outside on a cold winter's day and smoke rising slowly. Only the haunting refrain 'adesso sono nel vento' (ll. 9-10) reminds the reader of what the cause of this smoke is.

The name 'Auschwitz' appears once more, in the opening line of verse three, serving a metonymical function which, more than two decades after the liberation of the camps, (sub)consciously triggers numerous associations within the audience. Guccini's 'Auschwitz' certainly avoids the direct and vivid imagery adopted by Quasimodo, and the *cantautore* uses language which is

⁵² See Vincenzo Pappalettera, *Tu passerai per il camino* (Milan: Mursia, 1965) and Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture*, p. 123.

simultaneously highly simplistic and yet also encourages deeper reflection and engagement. Guccini's use of simplistic language, with words such as 'vento', 'bambino' and 'uomo' repeated throughout the song, results in two significant and complementary effects: he renders 'Auschwitz' easily accessible and easy to remember; and he also uses these general terms as metaphors for much vaster, and more complex notions. Thus the 'bambino' comes to represent the millions of Holocaust victims, while 'uomo' – as in Quasimodo's poems – is the whole gamut of mankind, acting at any point during history's many atrocities. The 'grande silenzio' (l. 12) is an example of Guccini's ambiguous language, and could function either as a euphemism for death or as a reference to the air of oppression which pervaded in the Lager. To the careful listener it does both, and Guccini's 'Auschwitz' becomes loaded with meaning: the interpreter drawing on the audience's hyperawareness of the Holocaust, a topic, which was experiencing significant renewed focus in 1960s Italy.

The rhyme scheme breaks down further in this third verse, with only the repetition in the final two lines of the omnipresent 'vento' linking back to the preceding verses and propelling the song forwards. Alongside this deteriorating rhyme-scheme is the first rupture of the octosyllabic rhythm. The refrain in lines fourteen and fifteen differs from that in the previous two verses, and is not only hypermetrical, but also inverts the established pattern of three syllables - caesura - five syllables: 'a sorridere qui nel vento' is sung in such a way as to form a five syllable - caesura - four syllable line. By deviating from the song's established rhythm and also featuring a hyperbeat within the two pivotal lines of this verse, Guccini creates the sensation that he is guiding the listener towards a powerful crescendo. The *cantautore* effectively signposts his song vocally and musically, driving the listener to the final lines of the third verse: 'è strano non riesco ancora/ a sorridere qui nel vento' (ll. 13-4). These lines are slightly uncomfortable, since they have a redemptive quality which is underscored by the word 'ancora'. This 'ancora' suggests that at some point this victim may be appeased and will return to playful happiness. But Guccini's intention here is not to suggest that the genocide can be forgotten or undone, and his true meaning

is revealed in the following verse. The 'ancora' calls for future change: the victim calls for the remaking of man.

The next verse builds towards the crescendo, by encouraging the audience to reflect on the essential questions surrounding man's capacity for cruelty. The first line of verse four is sung in a higher pitch, with increased volume and intensity, to aurally mark the significance of the words. It is notable that Guccini phrases the question: 'come può un uomo/ uccidere un suo fratello' (ll. 16-7) in the present tense, as this extends the meaning universally, incorporating not only the Holocaust atrocities, but all human massacres, and man's seeming readiness to kill. By referring to the murder of a brother, Guccini recalls the biblical story of Cain and Abel, thus presenting man's violence as an age-old phenomenon which must be overcome. The internal rhyme between 'può' and 'uomo' is further emphasised through Guccini's use of sinalefe, which elides the phrase so that it becomes 'come può^un^uomo' (l. 16), inextricably linking the three words, and rendering the rhetorical question more emphatic and emotional.

In this verse, as in the very first, an idea of the scale of destruction is presented to the reader. While the opening of the song refers to 'another hundred' (l. 1) murdered alongside the child speaker, this central verse presents the true enormity of the Holocaust, and Guccini writes of the 'milioni/ in polvere qui nel vento' (ll. 18-9). Again, Guccini strikes a delicate balance between confronting and protecting the reader: the reference to death is oblique, a euphemism which effectively masks the true violence of the camps; however the dead are described as 'here in the wind' (my emphasis), they are all-encompassing, surrounding both singer and listener, remade through Guccini's lyrics, their presence demanding a response.

The anticipated crescendo comes in the fifth verse, where a new word, 'ancora', comes to the fore, building upon its first appearance in line 13. Though 'ancora' does not appear in the prominent rhyme position, it is the very first word of lines 21 and 22. This anaphorical repetition contributes to the notable consonance which is built through repeated 'n', 'c' and 'o' sounds. The first line of the verse

also contains several internal half-rhymes with 'ancora', 'tuona' and 'cannone' providing a harsh edge to Guccini's lyrics. The harshness reflects the bitterness with which this 'ancora' is imbued, as the *cantautore* laments the continuing tragedy of the bloodthirsty 'human beast' (l. 23). This verse is fundamental to the song, and is sandwiched between two verses which raise pertinent questions with the listeners: 'how could it happen' (l. 16) and 'when will it end' (l. 26). The 'ancora' is vital here, as it explicitly refers to the ongoing crimes against humanity, and thus provides a pessimistic prognosis in response to line twenty-six. Guccini's message is clear: though this song is nominally about Auschwitz, and the narrator child who was murdered there, it is in fact a response to universal atrocities, and calls for general reflection and an end to all acts of violence.

Guccini explores the depths of humanity, and while the fourth and sixth verses call for reflection and an end to the violence of 'man' (l. 16 and l. 26); as his fifth verse states, it is not the rational 'uomo' who controls the impulse to murder, but the 'belva umana' (l. 23). Sitting within an intellectual tradition which explores the very nature of 'l'uomo' after Auschwitz, a *topos classico* in Quasimodo's discussion of poetry after World War Two - Guccini suggests that the part of mankind capable of murder is not in fact human at all. In this sixth verse the *cantautore* calls for a time when man 'potrà imparare/ a vivere senza ammazzare' (ll. 27-28) referring to the need for man to change, to be remade in such a way as to overcome the base, animalistic traits which facilitate murder. Guccini's song incites this hybrid 'human beast' within all of us to renounce its inhuman behaviour, and make a conscious move towards a humane treatment of others.

The sixth and seventh verses represent a return to the rhyme-scheme of verse one, and thus conclude 'Auschwitz' with an easily assimilated mnemonic pattern. These final verses allude to an uncertain future time when mankind is able to 'imparare/ a vivere senza ammazzare' (ll. 27-8 and ll. 32-33). Guccini's enunciates 'imparare' in a particularly notable way, placing a heavy emphasis on the 'p', thus providing the listener with a hint of a double meaning: both 'imparare' and

'parare' can be heard: a plea, perhaps, to stop the beastly behaviour which continues 'ancora'.

This sixth verse, and its repetition to form the seventh verse, simultaneously move away from the song's earlier rhyme-scheme, and acts as its most faithful adherent: the A-B-B-A-A structure returns, however the rhymes are all bastardised half-rhymes, and the crucial concluding rhyme of 'vento' has been replaced, quite fittingly, with 'poserò'. Guccini presents in these final two verses the potential for a new order, and therein hope for an end to the enduring cycle of violence. Guccini's aspirations for peace are both tentative and secure: they are presented as a future aim, currently out of reach; however he uses the simple future, rather than the conditional, to signal that though the timeframe is unknown, the outcome is certain.

The final echoing refrain of the song: 'il vento si poserà' (ll. 34-6) looks for a time when the violence of mankind has been quelled. The child-speaker confronts the audience with the failings of man, using simple language which defies incomprehension. Guccini, as the *cantautore*, has a clear strategy for delivering his post-Auschwitz message: his song is accessible to all, and can be interpreted on a number of levels. Adhering to the imperatives of song, no listener, even after just the first hearing, could be unaware of what the song demands: an end to human violence. For the engaged listener, the true intended audience of the *canzone d'autore*, Guccini's 'Auschwitz' uses ambiguous language to force the listener to create their own meaning, to engage with the past and ensure that society prevents such atrocities from reoccurring. By selecting a young child-victim as the deliverer of his preventative message, Guccini evokes the dead so that the audience will be moved to remake themselves.

2.8 Francesco Guccini, 'Lager'

In 1981 Guccini released the album *Metropolis* (EMI Italiana, 1981), which features the song 'Lager', signalling the *cantautore's* return to the Holocaust theme. The song is a marked departure from Guccini's earlier work, 'Auschwitz',

both acoustically and lyrically. While 'Auschwitz' follows a regular 6/8 pattern, the rhythm and tempo change at various points in 'Lager', and Guccini often delivers his lines in a syncopated style, keeping the listener guessing at all times. The *cantautore's* vocal style is also much harsher than in his earlier work, and the rapid flow of words is shouted rather than sung for much of the song.

The fast pace of 'Lager' allows Guccini to present a wealth of information to the listener: at sixty-five lines long, the song is almost twice the length of 'Auschwitz', though its duration is more than a minute less. Guccini squeezes a great deal of detail into 'Lager', and as a result the listener feels almost ambushed and bombarded by the intensity and urgency of the song. This is extremely effective, since it conveys in a small way the disorientation and confusion of the camps themselves.

The song begins with a rhetorical question, 'Cos'è un lager?', which is repeated at various points throughout the song, and which Guccini attempts to answer in the different verses. It is notable that Guccini uses the term 'lager' as the title for his song, since this automatically invites comparison with his 'Auschwitz'. It is significant that while 'Auschwitz' superficially appears to be about a Nazi camp, it is in fact a song about man's general violence, extending to that outside the camps. In 'Lager', it is the camps themselves which have, like the omnipresent violence in 'Auschwitz', taken over, moving from the historical past into present society: an admission that art has hitherto failed to remake man. 'Lager' demonstrates the approach adopted by Guccini in an attempt to finally *rifare l'uomo* almost forty years after Auschwitz.

The first fifteen lines of 'Lager' form a cohesive sense unit in which Guccini first asks and then answers the question 'cos'è un lager'. This rhetorical question appears three times in this first section (lines 1, 6 and 15). Repetition of this line creates an overarching identical rhyme which continually turns the listener's attention to the true message of the song. This song uses a highly repetitive rhyme scheme (the first verse, for example, follows the pattern: A-B-B-B-C-A-D-

D-D-C-E-E-E-F-A), in which the word 'lager' is jarringly conspicuous, since, as a German word, it has no natural rhymes in the Italian language.

Rhyme is fundamental in this song, and builds steadily towards the final verse, and the highly effective close of 'Lager'. While the fast pace of the song at times affects the clarity of the delivery, the interlinking rhymes place an emphasis on the words in this key end-of-line position, and allow Guccini to efficiently build up the message of his song. The *cantautore's* first exploration of the Lager is indicative of this pattern, and enables Guccini to make a subtle cultural criticism within his response. He says:

È una cosa nata in tempi tristi,
dove dopo passano i turisti,
occhi increduli agli orrori visti,
"non gettar la pelle del salame" (ll. 2-5)

These four lines present a strong implied criticism, first through the rhyming of 'tristi' and 'turisti' (ll. 2-3), which suggests a dimension of morbid voyeurism inherent in contemporary society's fascination with visiting the concentration camps in tourist groups, in much the same way as they might visit the Colosseum in Rome. These four lines emphasise the stark contrast between these tragic places of suffering, and the tourists whose superficial interest leaves them 'increduli' (l. 4), but not truly engaged. Guccini encapsulates this disengagement by following the rhyming triplet of tristi/turisti/visti with the line "non gettar la pelle del salame" (l. 5), a banal, quotidian line, which simultaneously signals the tourist's casual disengagement, and the disparity between the visitor's overabundance of food, and the starving prisoner's slow death in the camps.

This first verse of fifteen lines focuses on the ways in which the Holocaust is remembered by society, forty years on. The second section of the verse is indicative of Guccini's clear desire to engage with the complex notions of memory and testimony surrounding the Holocaust, as well as an awareness of his own responsibility to contribute to the body of cultural responses, not by creating a palatable work, but by challenging and engaging the listening public.

In these lines he introduces the spectre of Holocaust denial, by progressing first from one popular fallacy: 'non ce n'è mai stato, solo in quel momento,/ l'uomo in fondo è buono, meno il nazi infame' (ll. 9-10) to 'Ma ce n'è, ma c'è chi li ha veduti/ o son balle di sopravvissuti?' (ll. 11-2). Guccini begins by introducing the assertion that the camps (and associated cruelty) were unique to the Nazi genocide, and isolated to that single moment in time: a belief which fails to take into consideration the continuing genocidal behaviour of man, which Guccini himself attempted to deter with 'Auschwitz'. He demonstrates the (Italian) public's clear desire to disassociate from the Holocaust, by suggesting that the Nazis are fundamentally different from 'good' mankind. Line 10 is a perfect trochaic hexameter, and Guccini achieves this falling rhythm by using *sinalefe* to elide the vowels: 'l'uomo^in fondo^è buono, meno il nazi^infame'. This elision, strengthened by the internal rhyme of 'uomo' and 'buono', creates a dichotomy between society in general, and the Nazis. Guccini moves from this example of society's wilful ignorance, to an altogether more disturbing post-Auschwitz development: the expression of doubt regarding the Holocaust's existence at all, which the *cantautore* conveys in lines 11 and 12. Broaching the delicate and controversial issue of Holocaust denial and the questioning of survivor validity is a surprising step, and one which Guccini negotiates extremely well in 'Lager'. The location of these topics within the song is fundamental: the *cantautore* presents these issues at the very start of the song, playing the devil's advocate, and voicing doubts and concerns which have been expressed by a minority, and which may be privately shared by any number of Italians; Guccini thus allows himself the rest of the song to counter these claims, and present evidence in an attempt to convince his audience once and for all not only of the true and atrocious nature of the Holocaust, but of its ongoing significance for modern society.

In the second verse, Guccini adopts a calmer delivery style: singing rather than shouting. This effectively mirrors the increasingly emotional nature of the song, which moves from the singular in verse one ('È una cosa' (l. 7)) to the plural 'sono' (l. 16), and the introduction, therefore, of the victims themselves. This shift in perspective is mirrored by a softening of the musical accompaniment, and a

slower tempo. Of the twelve lines in this verse, eleven begin with an anaphorical repetition of 'son(o)', and Guccini presents the listener with line after line of description, to build a three-dimensional picture of the physical, emotional and psychological dimension of the Lager. Guccini begins by depicting the physical decline and desolation of the victims: 'sono mille e mille occhiaie vuote/ sono mani magre abbarbicate ai fili' (ll. 16-17). The present tense immerses the listener in the horror of the camps and creates a sense of intense discomfort at the casual voyeurism of the tourists in the opening lines, who visit the scenes but are spared the true tragedy of the Holocaust.

Progressing away from the physicality of the victims, Guccini depicts the organisation and structure of the camps: 'son baracche, uffici, orari, timbri e ruote/ son routine e risa dietro a dei fucili' (ll. 18-9), presenting first the infamous strict Nazi order, and then the sadism, which is manifested in the pleasure, even glee of the firing squads. Guccini returns once more to the victims in lines 20-22, relating their inner turmoil, and the overwhelming emotional ordeal of the camps, which inspire: 'paura' (l. 20), 'angoscia' (l. 21) and finally 'pazzia' and 'allucinazione' (l. 22), which cause our own feeble sensations of listener discomfort to pale into insignificance. Guccini dextrously drives the listener towards a frank self-assessment by dividing his descriptions in the second verse as follows: victims (physical) - Nazis - victims (emotional) - us. Indeed, the *cantautore* devotes five lines to our own relation to the Holocaust in this verse, equalling the space he grants to both the physical and emotional descriptions of the victims themselves. He first rebuilds the dead, and then encourages the listener to focus on the need for society's, and their own, positive renewal.

Guccini echoes the confrontational stance of Quasimodo's 'Il mio paese è l'Italia', forcing the audience to acknowledge their own involvement. The 'Lager', Guccini states, is 'il lato buio della nostra mente' (l. 24) - an atrocity of which we are all capable. The camps, he asserts, are something which, at worst we hasten to forget (l. 25) and at best, 'sono un manifesto che si può firmare' (l. 27). This final line highlights the way in which the Holocaust has become an abstract concept and the public, even when not immobilised by apathy, is capable only of pointless

petitions. There is, however, a certain hypocrisy inherent in Guccini's implied criticism of the empty words of the 'manifesto', since his song – his call to action – is also formed of words alone. The difference, of course, is the belief that Quasimodo so vociferously stated, that *poetical* words, and those who write them, hold the potential for change.

Guccini moves, in the third verse, to an echoing of the first, and this is reflected in a return both to the rhyming pattern of the opening verse, and also to a shouting rather than a singing style of delivery. The *cantautore* reintroduces the concept that the Holocaust is a discrete (and past) historical entity, conveying this notion succinctly in line 29: 'Il fenomeno ci fu. È finito!'. Guccini once again voices the Italian post-Auschwitz desire to dispel the blame: the Holocaust is a

cosa vergognosa di certe nazioni,
noi ammazziamo solo per motivi buoni
quando sono buoni? Sta a noi giudicare! (ll. 35-7)

As songwriter and singer, Guccini is able to temper his delivery, and ensure the emphasis is placed exactly where he wishes. In this case, he heightens the irony between the smug dissociation from the shameful acts of certain (implied other) countries, and the self-regulated Italian killings which – of course – are always for justifiable causes. To judge such cases, naturally, are 'noi', a monosyllable emphatically delivered by Guccini, which refers not only to Italians, but to those countries which emerged from the Second World War with a sense of moral superiority. This general criticism is maintained throughout 'Lager', with the title itself avoiding physical specificity in order to reiterate that the horror is everywhere, and not just located in a metonymical, distance location, such as Auschwitz. This apparent blindness to historical parallels builds towards the final verse, which will focus on the arbitrary nature of violence, and systematically deconstructs the arguments, based on (wilful) ignorance and even malice, which he has presented throughout the song.

The concluding four lines of this verse introduce another highly controversial topic, and Guccini presents an anti-Semitic stance and cements its centrality to

the Italian public, by referring to the *antiebraismo* which was propounded by Catholic conservatives. From this anti-Jewish perspective, the Lager is not a tragedy, but represents salvation:

È una fede certa e salverà la gente,
l'utopia che un giorno si farà presente
millenaria idea, gran purga d'occidente
chi si oppone è un Giuda e lo dovrai schiacciare! (Il. 39-42)

These lines begin with references to faith, salvation, and a paradisaal utopia, before taking a more ominous turn which is a clear reference to the desire to destroy international Jewry. The phrase 'millenaria idea' serves both to normalise the belief, by presenting this purge (or 'ethnic cleansing') as an age-old, natural concept; and also to reiterate the ongoing suffering of the Jews, throughout history. The final allusion, which implicitly ties this section to Catholic conservatism, rather than presenting it as foreign and other, is the reference to 'Giuda'. Judas is an infamous figure for the part he played, along with (as some branches of Christianity believe) the Jews, in the death of Christ. The inference is that whoever opposes the destruction of the Jews is siding with the betrayers of Jesus. Guccini highlights the perversion of faith for base, even genocidal means, and brings the Catholic Church and therefore, to a great extent Italy, into the centre of the frame.

The next verse returns once more to the alternate rhyme of verse two, and opens with an allusion to the dehumanisation of the victims, and the inhumane behaviour of the captors:

son recinte e stalli di animali strani,
gambe che per anni fan gli stessi passi,
esseri diversi, scarsamente umani,
cosa fra le cose, l'erba, i mitra, i sassi (Il. 44-7)

Guccini's lyrics present a deteriorating picture of the victims, in which their loss of humanity is taken for granted. The start of the section depicts them as 'strange animals': beasts of burden, who are worked relentlessly; however, as the lines progress they become unrecognisable as living, sentient beings, and become just

another 'thing'. Guccini's list of 'things' which, due to *sinalefe*, forms a trochaic tetrameter: 'l'erba,^i mitra,^i sassi', linking the three items, is particularly noteworthy since he sandwiches 'i mitra' between two natural images, suggesting that the paraphernalia of death has become an intrinsic part of nature. This symbiosis of genocide and nature is the tragic endpoint of the deterioration of nature around the camps, as depicted in Quasimodo's poetry about the Holocaust. Writing decades later, Guccini's view is more pessimistic, and his driving imperative to remake man is, therefore, all the more urgent and pressing.

As this verse progresses, Guccini forces the listener to question the validity of political and religious justifications of human cruelty, presenting the Lager as 'una causa santa, un luminoso scopo' (l. 51) and 'sempre per qualcosa, sempre per la pace' (l. 53). The cantautore presents the typical excuses for mass genocide in a list which, further accentuated by anaphora, juxtaposes the often conflicting reasons and therefore forces the reader to comprehend the inconsistencies, and deduce that there is no valid motive or excuse for such cruelty.

In the final verse, Guccini condenses the song's message and builds relentlessly to his crescendo with eight consecutive rhyming lines, all of which finish with a stressed syllable. In this verse the cantautore focuses on the omnipresent nature of the Lager, and the threat to the future which humanity's cruelty contains: 'È una cosa stata, cosa che sarà/ può essere in un ghetto, fabbrica, città' (ll. 57-8). Guccini effectively dispels the myth, referred to at several points in this song, that the Lager is a unique and isolated phenomenon. Here he not only states that the camps are also a threat of the future, he links the two temporal dimensions with the fluid trochaic hexameter of line 57. The singer then counters the assertion that the Lager belong to a fixed geographical location, by moving from one of the familiar focal points of Holocaust cruelty, the ghetto, to the increasingly general locations of the factory and then the city, to demonstrate the all-pervading and all-encompassing nature of violence. Having presented the omnipresence of threat, Guccini next focuses on the arbitrariness (and therefore senselessness) of cruelty:

contro queste cose o chi non lo vorrà
contro chi va contro o le difenderà,
prima per chi perde e poi chi vincerà (ll. 59-61)

Alongside the oppressive accented endings of the lines, Guccini uses consonance and repetition to convey his harsh message that no one can consider themselves innocent or safe from the Lager. The repetition of 'contro' in lines fifty-nine and sixty creates a complex web of opposition in which everyone becomes ensnared, irrespective of beliefs and ideologies. Victory and defeat are merely temporary positions, he states, and the tide turns quickly.

As Guccini pushes forcefully towards the end of the song, the tempo increases, as does the pitch and volume of his accusatory, shouting delivery. His pessimistic lyrics force the listener to confront their own ingrained beliefs: 'uno ne finisce ed uno sorgerà/ sempre per il bene dell'umanità' (ll. 62-3), as he presents, for one final time, the obstinate refrain used to justify cruelty. After the preceding sixty-two lines, however, this position is untenable. Violence, he has stated, is arbitrary: an endlessly repeated and constantly shifting facet of humanity's most base impulses. To justify the Lager in this way is tantamount to active participation, and to emphasise this point, Guccini closes the song with the apotheosis of his powerful message: 'chi fra voi kapò, chi vittima sarà/ in un lager?' (ll. 64-5). The climax of his song is marked by the inclusion of the heavy stress of 'kapò' midway through the line, followed almost immediately by the stressed line ending 'sarà'. The listener has been swept along to this point by the relentless rhythm and increasing tempo, and this final message is delivered emphatically by the *cantautore*. What Guccini implies with these words, of course, is that we will all be kapò and victims at some point, since the roles are constantly shifting arbitrarily, depending simply on who has the upper hand at any given point. No one is exempted from the cruel violence of humanity which, paradoxically, we claim is for the good of mankind.

Guccini refuses to allow for any doubt to enter his pessimistic claims, and the continuation of the Lager is presented as a definite occurrence with the word 'sarà'. This stance is diametrically opposed to his use of the simple future in

'Auschwitz', which optimistically predicted an end to such violence. The song itself finishes immediately with Guccini's final utterance of 'lager', a sort of anticlimax after his frenzied assault on the listener, which leaves the audience with the sense that the song ought to continue. This sensation stimulates reflection and further adds to the audience's disquiet.

'Lager' is not a simple song, it cannot be repeated or absorbed fully after a single listening but demands close attention and engagement. Guccini's stance in this song appears resolutely pessimistic, which is perhaps due to its increased distance from the years of the Holocaust, and the realisation that the cruelty of the past remains a present and future concern. In a curious way, however, Guccini's pessimism becomes an effective call to action: his words seem to incite the listener to prove him wrong, with a sort of reverse psychology. Forty years after Auschwitz, Guccini demonstrates a new direction in poetical art, in which the audience is confronted with a barrage of violent images, in an effort to stimulate change. Though Guccini's 'Lager' is a departure from his own 'Auschwitz', and the two Quasimodo poems analysed in this chapter, his tact is strikingly reminiscent of Quasimodo's own assertion: '[l]a posizione del poeta non può essere passiva nella società: egli "modifica" il mondo [...] [l]e sue immagini forti, quelle create, battono sul cuore dell'uomo più della filosofia e della storia.'⁵³ Guccini adheres to Quasimodo's view of poetry, creating strong images which are intended to move mankind and bring about reflection and, ultimately, change.

2.9 Conclusion

The works of Salvatore Quasimodo and Francesco Guccini belong to two quite distinct traditions, yet, as this chapter has established, the *canzone d'autore* is a genre inextricably linked with poetry, and equally worthy of critical attention. The two men's work about Auschwitz can be thought of as complementary: the former is a beloved composer of lyrical poetry, the latter a celebrated writer of

⁵³ Quasimodo, 'Discorso sulla poesia', in *Il poeta e il politico e altri saggi*, p. 46.

poetical lyrics. Their shared belief in art's capacity to *rifare l'uomo* is evident in their works about the Holocaust. Both men composed watershed pieces which captured society's attention and struck a chord with the reader and listener. By analysing two works by each writer we have witnessed the way in which both Quasimodo and Guccini shift tack across their texts in renewed attempts to bring about a positive change in their audience.

'Il mio paese è l'Italia' was written very shortly after the liberation of the camps, and Quasimodo berates the public's lack of memory and lack of empathy. He confronts the reader with harsh imagery and difficult language. In this poem the readers' engagement becomes a part of their own moral renewal: by endeavouring to understand the poem's dense tangle of references and images the reader is actively helping to rebuild and acknowledge the past.

In his more celebrated poem, 'Auschwitz', Quasimodo adopts a gentler tone, which entreats, rather than demands the reader to engage. His focus is on rebuilding the victims, and even the perpetrators, their shadowy presence itself inciting the reader to engage with the past. This poem presents Quasimodo's optimism for the future, and a world where murders are no longer allowed to happen.

Guccini's 'Auschwitz' demonstrates a similar optimism and gentleness, perhaps accounting for why it too achieved recognition as a watershed work and has become one of the *cantautore's* most celebrated works. The singer writes from a child-victim's perspective, using simple language to make the past accessible to the listener. This simplicity also opens the lyrics up for interpretation, inviting the intellectually and politically engaged listener to look beyond the words to the violence and brutality, which are masked by euphemisms and ambiguities. The 'bambino' is rebuilt in the poem, afforded a presence and indeed an authority, which was denied to him as an inmate. The child makes demands of the reader, pleading for a future in which man is remade without violence. This future is presented as an inevitability: an expression of Guccini's belief in the power of words.

'Lager' comes more than a decade later, and bears witness to man's continued violence and cruelty. Like Quasimodo's 'Il mio paese è l'Italia', the *cantautore* bombards the listener with violent images and accusations, challenging the audience to prove him wrong in his pessimistic prognosis for humanity. 'Lager' is a decided shift in Guccini's style, and seems like a shock tactic, adopted by the singer in a desperate attempt to stimulate change.

Both men, though writing at different times, within different genres and for different audiences, demonstrate the same belief in art's societal role after Auschwitz, and revisit their engagement with the Holocaust in an attempt to refine their struggle to remake man. Their enduring success as artists suggests that, even if man has not been completely reformed, he is still reading, and still listening.

Chapter 3 TRANSLATING THE HOLOCAUST: PAUL CELAN'S 'TODESFUGE' IN ITALY

3.1 Introduction

Unlike the other chapters in this thesis, the central focus of this chapter is on a poem which was written not in Italian, but in German. Since its publication in *Mohn und Gedächtnis* in 1952, Paul Celan's 'Todesfuge' has arguably become such a central component of the Holocaust canon that it will be familiar to many Italian readers, whether or not they possess German language skills. Its success and adoption as a Holocaust poem *par excellence* was not without controversy, as shall be discussed below.

Celan's 'Todesfuge' undeniably encapsulated the horror and trauma of the Holocaust for readers around the world, and this chapter will look at four Italian translations of the poem, spanning a period of over 60 years. The temporal spread of the translations is itself clear evidence of a continuing interest in and demand for Italian translations of Celan's much-anthologised work. We'll analyse these four versions in order to shed light on how the realities of the Holocaust can be communicated across languages. Centring around five core translation cruxes, our analysis will explore issues of translator mediation, balancing style and content in Holocaust translation and how Celan's work has been received and adopted in Italy as an iconic Holocaust poem. Beginning with a biographical examination of Paul Antschel/Celan, the chapter will then address the critical reception the poem faced, in Italy and elsewhere, before moving on to an increasingly nuanced exploration of translation, peeling back the layers from translation in general, to poetry translation, and finally translating Celan, and the unique challenges Holocaust poetry presents to both translators and readers. This chapter offers a fresh assessment of the Italian translations of Celan's 'Todesfuge' going beyond existing literature, which offers a comparatively superficial commentary on the works,¹ to present an in-depth analysis which looks closely at language, metre and style in order to offer the reader text-based practical examples

¹ See the discussion of Diletta D'Eredità's work in section 3.8.

of how Celan's Italian translators tackle the notorious difficulties of his work, and how they have interpreted and presented his famously complex original.

3.2 Paul Celan

Born in 1920 in Czernowitz, Paul Antschel was brought up in a Jewish family. Although German was, famously, his mother tongue, he spoke a number of languages, and indeed translated works from Romanian, French, Russian and English.² The exact details of the parental loss which haunts his later works are not known, but Antschel's mother and father were rounded up and deported in June 1942, while their son was away from the family home. Both parents perished: his mother was shot when she was deemed unfit to work, and his father died of typhus. Celan's anxiety of separation and sensations of guilt are tangible in his work, and references – particularly to his mother – recur throughout his poetical production.

Antschel spent much of the war incarcerated in a forced labour camp, where he continued to write poetry, as he had done from his teenage years.³ Unusually, for poems written in Nazi camps, a significant corpus of poems has survived from this time. John Felstiner assesses the poems from this period as:

[i]mbued with melancholy, homesickness, and longing for his beloved and laden with expressionist nature imagery, [these poems] also deal in literary and mythological references. [...] He was casting about among traditions.⁴

More than the raw, cathartic endeavour Edith Bruck describes (see 1.5), it appears that Celan was consciously searching among established traditions for his own poetic voice. Indeed, poetry seems to have provided the academically gifted Antschel with an intellectual focal point during his difficult life in World War Two, and it continued to provide a focus after his return from the labour camps in 1944. It was at this point that his most celebrated work, 'Todesfuge', was composed. This work is striking from its very title, which challenges and resists translation, as Felstiner comments: '[i]ts

² See Jean Boase-Beier, 'Bringing Home the Holocaust: Paul Celan's *Heimkehr* in German and English', *Translation and Literature*, 23 (2014), 222-34 (p. 225), and also Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, p. 43.

³ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, p. 15.

⁴ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, p. 16.

title in English might be “Fugue of Death,” “Death’s Fugue,” “Death Fugue,” or “Deathfugue”,⁵ and translators into other languages have faced similar conundrums, as the four Italian translations we shall analyse below will demonstrate.

‘Todesfuge’ begins as it means to go on, startling the reader with unexpected imagery and a hypnotic rhythm which is at odds with the horror of the words. Not only is ‘Todesfuge’ surprising, it is dense, containing an:

array of historical and cultural signals – some overt and direct, some recondite or glancing. Practically every line embeds verbal material from the disrupted world to which this poem bears witness. From music, literature, and religion and from the camps themselves we find discomfiting traces of Genesis, Bach, Wagner, Heinrich Heine, the tango, and especially *Faust*’s heroine Margareta, alongside the maiden Shulamith from the Song of Songs.⁶

This density simultaneously aids and resists translation: providing the translator with insights into Celan’s sources and inspirations, but weaving a complex web which often defies straightforward transfer into a new language. It is precisely this complexity which continues to captivate readers, and which justifies continued attention and new translations of the poem.

There is some debate as to when precisely ‘Todesfuge’ was composed, though it is thought that Celan wrote the poem in 1944/1945,⁷ making it a contemporary of Levi’s ‘25 febbraio 1944’ (see section 1.4), ‘Buna’ and ‘Shemà’ (see section 1.6) and Quasimodo’s ‘Il mio paese è l’Italia’ (see section 2.5). The publication of Celan’s original German language version was, however, preceded by a Romanian translation, which appeared in 1947, and which marks the first appearance of Antschel’s literary, anagram-based pseudonym ‘Celan’. Providing evidence of a widespread European reluctance to acknowledge the true gravity of the events of the Holocaust in the immediate postwar period, the Romanian translation is prefaced by an editor’s note explicitly underlining the fact that the poem is based on real events,

⁵ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, p. 26.

⁶ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, pp. 26-7.

⁷ There is some debate, and accounts vary, but in a 1962 anthology Celan wrote ‘Bucharest 45’ next to the poem, see Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, pp. 27-8.

as if anticipating the reader's incredulity and disbelief.⁸ Following this initial publication of Celan's work, it was later published as the German original in 1952, and first appeared in Italy in German in 1956, in *Botteghe Oscure*. The first Italian translation would appear two years later in Gilda Musa's *Poesia tedesca del dopoguerra*.⁹

3.3 'Todesfuge' in Italy

Gilda Musa (1926-1999) was a writer most celebrated for her science-fiction writing. However, she is fundamental to the literary history of 'Todesfuge', as the first published Italian translator of the poem.¹⁰ Indeed, her obituary in the *Corriere della Sera* refers to her engagement with German writing, stating 'si era dedicata giovanissima allo studio della letteratura tedesca'.¹¹ Musa's translation would, in fact, remain the only published Italian translation for the next twenty years. Her own assessment of the poem's significance is evident not only in its inclusion within her anthology of postwar German poetry, but her placement of 'Todesfuge' as the first of six poems of Celan's poems included in the anthology. In her biographical notes on Celan, 'Todesfuge' is the only poem Musa discusses in detail, writing:

Ritmo, cadenze, sensazioni, visioni s'incalzano in una forma senza punteggiature, attraverso temi e variazioni che, per intrecci e sovrapposizioni, ricordano la fuga musicale, in una pressante serie di figurazioni ossessionati.¹²

Musa's description alludes the poem's almost spellbinding rhythmical pull. As we shall discuss later in this chapter, Musa was highly attuned to the musicality of the poem.

Musa's translation does not appear to have received a large amount of critical attention. Indeed, the poem, like a great many Holocaust works in the early postwar

⁸ 'The poem whose translation we are publishing is built upon the evocation of a real fact. In Lublin, as in many "Nazi death camps," one group of the condemned were forced to sing nostalgic songs while others dug graves.' See Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, p. 28.

⁹ Diletta D'Eredità, 'La ricezione italiana di Paul Celan: Il caso di *Todesfuge*', in *Paul Celan in Italia*, ed. by D'Eredità, Miglio and Zimarri, pp. 323-337 (p. 324).

¹⁰ This first Italian translation of 'Todesfuge' appeared in Gilda Musa, *Poesia tedesca del dopoguerra* (Milan: Schwarz, 1958).

¹¹ Giulia Borgese, 'Gilda Musa, tra poesia e fantascienza', *Corriere della Sera*, 27 February 1999, p. 35.

¹² Gilda Musa, *Poesia tedesca del dopoguerra*, p. 304.

years, was rather sidelined for a period. Poetry and translations were not the only victims of such neglect, and many works – such as Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* – which would become classics in Italy and internationally, were initially met with disinterest or even disdain (see 1.2).

The early acceptance of Celan's work was hindered by the usual reluctance shown towards Holocaust works in Italy during the 1950s. In addition, there were also some specific obstacles based on the poet's perceived style which held the work back during the two decades after its composition, as Arturo Larcati discusses, including 'un linguaggio percepito come ermetico', and which:

vengono aggravate da almeno altri due fattori concomitanti: da una parte la difficoltà di trovare un traduttore o dei traduttori congeniali e dall'altra l'accoglienza problematica che le è stata riservata, perlomeno all'inizio, dai critici e dai germanisti di professione.¹³

Larcati discusses a number of factors contributing to the slow reception of Celan in Italy: the poet's reputation for hermeticism (disputed by Celan himself, who declared to one of his English translators, Michael Hamburger, that his work was "absolutely not hermetic");¹⁴ the difficulty of finding a translator (although, of course, Musa's translation existed); and the criticism the poet faced from scholars, particularly Theodor Adorno – a figure who looms large in any discussion of Holocaust poetry.

All of those poets discussed in this thesis who were writing and publishing poetry in the 1950s and beyond did so under the shadow of Adorno's comments on poetry after Auschwitz (for a comprehensive exploration of this 'dictum' and the associated context, see the Introduction). Celan, however, perceived Adorno's words as a personal criticism and was vocal in his belief in and support of poetry after the Nazi atrocity:

Celan percepì le parole di Adorno come una vera e propria sentenza. Per lui scrivere poesie dopo Auschwitz rappresentava il respiro, la direzione, il senso

¹³ Arturo Larcati, 'La fortuna di Paul Celan in Italia negli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta', in *Paul Celan in Italia*, ed. by D'Eredità, Miglio and Zimarri, pp. 339-352 (p. 340).

¹⁴ Michael Hamburger, 'Introduction', in *Paul Celan: Selected Poems*, trans. by Michael Hamburger, pp. 19-34 (p. 29).

della vita che gli rimaneva da vivere. Cominciò così a lottare per confutare la tesi del filosofo e rivendicare il diritto d'esistenza della propria opera.¹⁵

Adorno ultimately retracted his assertion to some extent, commenting in *Negative Dialectics* (1973) that a 'perennial suffering has just as much right to find expression as a victim of torture has to scream. For this reason it may have been wrong to write that after Auschwitz no poetry could be written'.¹⁶ However, what continued to disappoint Celan was the critic's resolute refusal to speak out in favour of his work, to defend Celan from the criticism which arguably stemmed at least in part from Adorno's own previous position:

ciò che lo turbava maggiormente erano le critiche e gli attacchi rivolti a lui stesso, sistematicamente ripetuti all'uscita di ogni nuovo volume di poesie. In sua difesa si erano schierati noti esponenti della cultura come Marie Luise Kaschnitz, Ingeborg Bachmann e Peter Szondi. Adorno, invece, era rimasto in silenzio. Il filosofo si era mantenuto in disparte, manifestando, anche in questo frangente, la sua tendenza a restare lontano da qualunque *querelle* in cui potesse venire in qualche modo coinvolto. Celan, per il quale un sostegno pubblico da parte di Adorno avrebbe avuto grande significato, rimase profondamente deluso da questo comportamento elusivo.¹⁷

Celan faced criticism surrounding his perceived aestheticizing of atrocity, impenetrability and hermeticism, charges which fail to take into account the ultimate effect of his writing, in which 'the power and pathos of the poem arises from the extreme tension between its grossly impure material and its pure form'.¹⁸ Ironically, as Jean Boase-Beier argues, it is likely that Adorno's assertion led to Celan's work appearing to become increasingly hermetic, although:

His work's ambiguity and polysemy, which demands careful engagement and commitment on the reader's part, is not there to prevent communication but reflects Celan's conviction that what language needed was a hard-won 'sort of homecoming', achieved by making reference to its etymology, to its cross-linguistic links, and to its historical and ideological connotations [...] It was only by being aware of these antecedents and links that one could fully understand

¹⁵ Paola Gnani, 'Tra pietre e stelle: Paul Celan e la tesi adorniana sulla poesia dopo Auschwitz', in *Paul Celan in Italia*, ed. by D'Eredità, Miglio and Zimarri, pp. 121-133 (p. 121).

¹⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (1973), see also T. Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), xvi.

¹⁷ Gnani, 'Tra pietre e stelle', in *Paul Celan in Italia*, ed. by D'Eredità, Miglio and Zimarri, p. 127.

¹⁸ Hamburger, 'Introduction', in *Paul Celan*, p. 24.

not only language itself but how it could be distorted to serve an evil world view, and how it could be rescued from such distortion.¹⁹

Celan refuted on several occasions suggestions that he was a hermetic poet, and in his acceptance speech for the Bremen Literature Prize he discusses his own vision and intention for his poetry:

A poem, as a manifestation of language and thus essentially dialogue, can be a message in a bottle, sent out in the – not always greatly hopeful – belief that somewhere and sometime it could wash up on land, on heartland perhaps. Poems in this sense too are underway: they are making toward something. Toward what? Toward something standing open, occupiable, perhaps toward an addressable Thou, toward an addressable reality.²⁰

While his intentions were, in his own words, to speak to his readers and to open up a dialogue – essentially anti-hermetic aims – his work itself does have much in common with the hermetic movement. Hermetic poetry, a movement which originated in Italy in the 1920s and 1930s – although its influence spread far beyond the peninsula – is poetry which resists easy communication and comprehension, and which was accessible only to the literary elite, excluding the masses due to the obscurity of the imagery used. Dense and cryptic, Celan's work, especially poems such as 'Todesfuge' arguably has much in common with the hermetic movement, including the desire to avoid the clichés and empty words which had fed the fascist propaganda machines during the Second World War. As Celan makes clear, however, his poetry is designed to reach an audience, to *speak* to an audience, though it might require the effort of removing the metaphorical message from the bottle before it can be understood. His explicit assertion that poetry is a 'dialogue' makes his intentions as a poet clear: as is arguably crucial for a Holocaust poet, Celan wishes to communicate with his reader, and for this communication to be a reciprocal process and a joint endeavour. His work originates from him and his experiences, but it is its impetus forward, towards the other, which Celan focuses on in his speech.

¹⁹ Boase-Beier, 'Bringing Home the Holocaust', p. 226.

²⁰ Paul Celan, 'Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen', in *Paul Celan: Selected Poems*, trans. by Michael Hamburger, pp. 395-6 (p. 396).

Although Celan's work can arguably be perceived as hermetic in style due to its complexity and impenetrability, his intentions were not hermetic since his very impulse to write was driven by a desire to communicate the realities of the Holocaust. Poet Salvatore Quasimodo, discussed in Chapter 2, also had a reputation for hermeticism, and indeed he was one of the movement's principle proponents before his drive in the aftermath of World War Two to compose, like Celan, poetry which would contribute to a deeper understanding of the horrors of the Nazi atrocity. Quasimodo's social commitment was based upon an understanding, like Celan's, that poetry must be able to communicate to the reader, in order to inform and call for change. Quasimodo's poetry about the Holocaust, like Celan's, is complex, and written with the belief that poems about the Nazi camps should challenge the reader and demand active engagement.

Gilda Musa, in the biographical notes on Celan in her volume *Poesia tedesca del dopoguerra*, recalls her own conversation with Celan, and this exchange sheds further light on the author's intentions and perceptions of his own poetry: 'quando gli ho chiesto che mi parlasse della sua vita, ha risposto: "Le poesie sono quadri porosi: di lí sgorga tutto ciò che viene chiamato vita."'”²¹ Here Celan clearly alludes not only to the biographical nature of his work, and its communicative value, but his description of poetry as 'porous potraits' of his life is particularly pertinent, since porosity implies a reciprocal relationship between reader and writer, the ability for change over time, and shifting interpretations. All of these features distance his work from the hermetic movement.

Considering how commonly accusations of hermeticism, impenetrability and aestheticizing were levelled at Celan, and how the poet himself denied these claims and felt his poetry to be misunderstood, it is not surprising that he was reticent when it came to choosing the appropriate translators for his work, another factor which delayed his poetry's wider reception in Italy.

In 1962 Vittorio Sereni opened up a discussion with Celan regarding potential Italian translators of his work. It seems the poet-survivor had rather exacting ideas of who

²¹ Musa, p. 304.

would be suitable for the job, and Sereni's ultimately fruitless search lasted a number of years. Sereni wrote to potential candidate Andrea Zanzotto "'Come puoi immaginare, si desidera che sia un poeta a tradurlo e non un traduttore professionale. Questa è anzi la prima condizione di Celan'".²² Celan's preoccupation with finding the ideal Italian translator, and his insistence that the translator should be first and foremost a poet, is significant for the purpose of this chapter, though the author's preferences and endorsement, or lack thereof, did not inhibit translators from issuing their own versions of his work. The importance placed by Celan on the translator's poetic abilities demonstrates his desire for his work to be transferred into Italian as fully as possible: not simply the sense-meaning, but the poetic experience in its entirety. That Sereni was unable to find a translator to meet Celan's exacting standards also demonstrates the poet's fiercely protective sense of ownership of his poetry, and fear that translators might fail to convey its fundamental message.

It was not until 1976, after Celan's suicide, that the next Italian translation of 'Todesfuge' appeared, published by Mondadori. It was a collaborative effort by Marcella Bagnasco – an Italian native speaker, and Moshe Kahn – a German native speaker. A similar pairing of an Italian mother tongue and German mother tongue (Michele Ranchetti and Jutta Leskien) was used for the translations of those of Celan's poems which were published posthumously. This approach 'permette una comprensione profonda del testo di partenza',²³ and it also creates the potential for a richer transmission of the nuanced literary and cultural references contained within Celan's rich poetry, since the collaboration brings together two language specialists.

Giuseppe Bevilacqua's translation of 'Todesfuge' was published over twenty years later, in 1998, again by Mondadori. Bevilacqua, a scholar of German literature and active literary translator, was ideally placed to provide a new translation of Celan's poetry. His version was well-received, and he was awarded the 'Premio "Città di

²² Vittorio Sereni, *Lettera ad Andrea Zanzotto*, 28 febbraio 1962, cited by Diletta D'Eredità, in 'La ricezione italiana di Paul Celan', in *Paul Celan in Italia*, ed. By D'Eredità, Miglio and Zimarri, pp. 323-4.

²³ Diletta D'Eredità, 'Paul Celan in Italia. Poetica, campo culturale e traduzione' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Rome "La Sapienza", 2013), p. 7.

Monselice” per la traduzione’ in 1999 for efforts.²⁴ His translation, the first large collection of all of Celan’s poems, together with notes and scholarly introduction, is presented as a scholarly edition, suitable for academics as well as the interested lay reader. By creating a scholarly edition of Celan’s work, Mondadori and Bevilacqua ensure Celan is elevated to the core Italian Holocaust canon, which contributes to the successful continuation of the survivor-writer’s aims to communicate the atrocious realities of the Holocaust to his reader, indeed ensuring that Celan’s audience becomes ever wider.

Like many of the works discussed in this thesis, such as Primo Levi’s ‘Shemà’ (see 1.6) and Salvatore Quasimodo’s ‘Auschwitz’ (see 2.6), Celan’s ‘Todesfuge’ has entered the school syllabus in Italy as one of the core works on the Holocaust.

Considerando quali poesie di Celan, in traduzione italiana, sono state finora selezionate per essere pubblicate in volumi diversi, come antologie, libri di storia della letteratura e in riviste, si è notato che in ambito istituzionale e scolastico si predilige sempre il componimento *Todesfuge*, come esempio principale della sua produzione poetica²⁵

Of the various translations of Celan’s poem, Giuseppe Bevilacqua’s translation is currently used almost universally, presumably because it is the most established critical edition. Including Celan’s poem alongside the works of Italian writers is valuable in the teaching of the Holocaust, since it stresses the widespread, multinational devastation caused by the Nazi regime. Lesson plans with notes and discussion of ‘Todesfuge’ are readily available for teachers to download online.²⁶

The most recent Italian translation of ‘Todesfuge’ is Dario Borso’s 2016 version, which was published by Einaudi and appears as number 437 in the series ‘Collezione di poesia’. The text is the first Italian translation of Celan’s *Der Sand aus den Urnen*, the poet’s earliest collection of poems which had fallen into obscurity until recently.

²⁴ Premio <<Città di Monselice>> per la traduzione letteraria e scientifica, volume xxi, p. 427 <http://win.ossicella.it/traduzione/38-40%20pdf/Premio%20Monselice%2038-40.pdf> [accessed 22 February 2018].

²⁵ D’Eredità, ‘Paul Celan in Italia’ (unpublished master’s thesis), p. 8.

²⁶ See, for example, this discussion of ‘Todesfuge’, by Claudio Giunta: http://blog.deascuola.it/uploads/sites/5/2018/01/cuori_intelligenti_3b_02.pdf [accessed 20 March 2018].

Borso's intention, discussed in more detail below, is to revive a forgotten volume, rather than present a comprehensive collection of Celan's work, like the two Mondadori editions published previously, and his inclusion of 'Todesfuge' in the volume is a nod to the poem's centrality to the poet's *oeuvre*.

Although other translations of 'Todesfuge' exist, crafted by students, poetry lovers and scholars, such as German literature professor Ida Porena,²⁷ the versions by Gilda Musa, Moshe Kahn and Marcella Bagnasco, Giuseppe Bevilacqua, and Dario Borso represent the four commercially published translations most readily accessible to their contemporary readers over the last sixty years.²⁸ These four translations also offer a fascinating and equidistant insight into the translation of 'Todesfuge' in Italian from the 1950s to the present.

While, as we have explored above, Celan's reception in Italy (and elsewhere) was not always straightforward, the poet, and arguably 'Todesfuge' in particular, has profoundly shaped those authors in the peninsula writing about the Holocaust. In a conversation with John Felstiner, survivor-writer Primo Levi said of the poem: "'I carry it inside me like a graft.'" ²⁹ Celan's poem, with its remarkable lucidity and harrowing musicality, was introduced to the Italian reading public through the four translations which will be analysed in detail in section 3.8, and ultimately overcame the criticisms levelled at the poet and this poem in particular, to become a highly valued component of the Holocaust canon.

²⁷ On Ida Porena's version, see D'Eredità, 'Paul Celan in Italia' (unpublished master's thesis), pp. 13-14. As D'Eredità states, Porena's translation, 'Fuga della morte', was published in 2008 in a volume of conference proceedings from a 2007 conference on Celan in Naples. The volume is called *L'opera e la vita. Paul Celan e gli studi comparatistici*, ed. by Camilla Miglio and Irene Fantappiè (Naples: Edizioni dell'Università L'Orientale, 2008). The work is not commercially available.

²⁸ The translations by Gilda Musa and Moshe Kahn and Marcella Bagnasco are no longer in print.

²⁹ *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. by John Felstiner (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2001), xxii. It is essential to state that Levi's view of Celan's writing was not entirely positive, indeed in his essay 'Dello scrivere oscuro' he discusses the poet's obscure and often impenetrable style before commenting 'Abbiamo una responsabilità, finché viviamo: dobbiamo rispondere di quanto scriviamo, parola per parola, e far sí che ogni parola vada a segno', see Primo Levi, 'Dello scrivere oscuro', in *L'altro mestiere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), pp. 49-55 (pp. 53-4).

3.4 Celan's language choice

Previously in this thesis we have encountered a survivor-writer who has composed poetry and prose works in a language other than her mother tongue (see section 1.2). Edith Bruck adopted Italian as her literary language, and indeed her everyday language after her move to Rome in the 1950s. For Bruck, her native language of Hungarian is inextricably tied up with her Holocaust suffering, and traumatically recalls the family and friends she lost during the Nazi brutalities. The painful recollections which the use of Hungarian called to mind for Bruck led her to reject her native tongue and adopt Italian. Celan, conversely, staunchly refused to abandon the German language in his writing, even after he had lived in France for many years. Celan's resolution to continue to write in German after the Holocaust is all the more striking because he was a polyglot and a translator, who was adept in a number of languages, including Romanian, French and Russian.

The decision of whether to write and/or speak in one's original language or adopt a new language after the Holocaust was intensely personal and varied from survivor to survivor. It is clear that whichever mode of communication allows the individual to feel most able to express their experiences is of the most value to us as recipients and readers of testimony, in all its various permutations. As Dorota Glowacka writes:

Some scholars who have interviewed survivors claim that the truth of the traumatic experience can only be expressed in the language in which it happened. Others report that, exactly because the "truth" of the experience is so strongly associated with one's native tongue, a neutral, distant language can act as a protective shield, thus enabling the survivor to break the silence.³⁰

Celan actively wished to avoid the use of a 'neutral, distant language', and as Felstiner comments, he became 'an exemplary postwar poet because he insistently registered in German the catastrophe made in Germany.'³¹ Celan confronted Germany and the world with the German-ness of the Nazi regime, and this unflinching linguistic directness simultaneously points the finger of accusation at the complicit German

³⁰ Dorota Glowacka, 'The Trace of the Untranslatable: Emmanuel Levinas and the Ethics of Translation', *PhaenEx*, 7:1 (2012), 1-29 (pp. 10-11).

³¹ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, xvii.

people, while demonstrating how convincing, hypnotic and powerful the language can be.

In his acceptance speech for the Bremen Literature Prize, Celan discusses language and poetry at length, and his discussion is worth quoting at length:

Reachable, near and not lost, there remained in the midst of the losses one thing: language.

It, the language, remained, not lost, yes in spite of everything. But it had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through frightful muting, pass through the thousand darkneses of deathbringing speech. It passed through and gave back no words for that which happened; yet it passed through this happening. Passed through and could come to light again "enriched" by all this.

In this language I have sought, during those years and the years since then, to write poems: so as to speak, to orient myself, to find out where I was and where I was meant to go, to sketch out reality for myself.³²

Language, as Celan makes clear, acts as an anchor in his postwar life and writing. German has emerged from the Holocaust imbued, "enriched", with all that was suffered in its name, as well as all that survived in spite of it. German is essential to Celan's postwar remaking of himself, a literary-based rehabilitation process which we have already discussed with regards to fellow survivors Edith Bruck and Primo Levi (see Chapter 1). It was an essential part of himself he could not and would not give up, and which he considered imperative for successful testimony: '[a]sked how he could still write in German after the war, he replied: "Only in the mother tongue can one speak one's own truth. In a foreign tongue the poet lies."'"³³ His priority in his writing was evidently to present the world with the unflinching truth, which he felt best equipped to deliver in German.

German also represents a link to the mother who features so abundantly in Celan's poetry, and whose loss was clearly felt profoundly. While Celan was brought up in the multilingual Czernowitz, his mother insisted on the importance of using correct German and was a diligent instructor.³⁴ By writing in the German his mother had

³² Paul Celan, 'Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen', in *Paul Celan*, trans. by Hamburger, pp. 395-6.

³³ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, p. 46.

³⁴ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, p. 6.

favoured, as opposed to the other languages in which he was conversant, Celan is not only paying tribute to his mother, but communicating in a language which she would have understood and of which she would have approved. In 'Nearness of graves', Celan concludes by referring to his use of the language his mother had promoted, writing: 'And can you bear, Mother, as once on a time,/ the gentle, the German, the pain-laden rhyme?' (ll. 9-10).³⁵ Through these lines Celan's poetry addresses his mother, using the language she herself used, though making reference to the painful new legacy of the language.

As we shall see in section 3.8, Celan in fact goes a step beyond simply *using* German: in his poems, including notably in the very title 'Todesfuge', Celan creates many neologisms, thereby enriching and expanding the high German language his mother revered, and in this way forcing the language to find new means of expressing the realities of the Holocaust.

In this chapter, however, we are primarily concerned with 'Todesfuge' in *Italian*. Despite Celan's firm decision to compose his poetry in German, his work inevitably did find its way into many different languages. We might therefore ask if our encountering of the poem in Italian alters its core substance irreconcilably from the Celan's original 'Todesfuge'. John Felstiner, himself a translator of Celan's works, discusses the dangers and the importance of translating this survivor-writer's work:

To uproot and rewrite Celan in translation runs the risk of alienating an already alien voice. Yet this voice needs translating because of its very obscurity. Often his lines seem only half emerged from shadow, as if recovered from some lost tongue and needing further translation even for native speakers. New or odd or archaic words, ruptured syntax, ellipses, buried allusion, and contradiction fill the poet's "true-stammered mouth"³⁶

Though the translator faces an unenviable task when approaching Celan's work, translation is an essential part of 'Todesfuge's' history, since the poem was first published in Romanian translation before the German original appeared in print (see

³⁵ *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. by Felstiner, p. 11.

³⁶ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, xvii.

section 3.2). Indeed 'Todesfuge' is not unique in this sense, as Naomi Seidman observes:

The polyglot nature of Jewish discourse and the displacements of postwar life affected the vagaries of Holocaust literature: Paul Celan's "Todesfuge," for instance, was composed in the writer's native German, but first appeared in Romanian translation. Anne Frank's Dutch writings were translated into German by Otto Frank for his German-speaking mother to read before he attempted to find a publisher in the Netherlands for them. And a longer Yiddish version of Elie Wiesel's *Night* was published in Buenos Aires as *Un di velt hot geshvign* in 1956, two years before Wiesel's appearance on the French literary scene.³⁷

Other survivor-writers discuss the imperative of communicating across linguistic barriers. In *Se questo è un uomo* Primo Levi presents an episode in the camps in which he attempts to translate the words of Dante for fellow inmate Pikolo. The chapter, called 'Il canto di Ulisse', is a tense, desperate search for comprehension across languages, with Levi writing: 'Trattengo Pikolo, è assolutamente necessario e urgente che ascolti, che comprenda questo "come altrui piacque", prima che sia troppo tardi'.³⁸ While there are many reasons for Levi's urgency and his selection of this particular passage of *Inferno* (nostalgia, exile, the layering of knowledge giving – Levi to Pikolo; Dante to reader; Ulysses to Dante), the episode is ultimately a reflection on translation and the need to communicate something important to others, in spite of linguistic differences, and how this human impulse is exacerbated in extreme situations, such as the Holocaust. If the communication of knowledge was pivotal to Levi within the camps, the communication of knowledge about the camps is essential to humanity, after the Holocaust.

For readers, translations of Holocaust works offer fundamental insight and access to a wider range of works. Jean Boase-Beier has written extensively on translation and, in particular, Holocaust translation, and she highlights the disjunction between the reality of translation, which 'is one of the ways – indeed, the main way – in which the

³⁷ Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 201.

³⁸ Levi, *Se questo*, p. 103.

words of a Holocaust poet can be spoken for the poet after the poet has gone’;³⁹ and the predominantly negative perception of the translation of Holocaust works:

If translation is considered at all, it appears to be assumed that poetry arises in a particular, singular language and culture, and that it can therefore only be made available through translation to those of another language and culture partially and imperfectly. This assumption leads critics to speak of translation ‘loss’, to view translation as a necessary evil performed upon poetry that is by nature resistant [...]. Such a view represents a serious misunderstanding of both poetry and translation, and especially of poetry that arises from a communicative situation that already incorporates the idea of translation to such a large extent.⁴⁰

Towards the end of this quotation, Boase-Beier touches on a recurring topic in Holocaust literature studies, discussed in section 1.3: the writing of Holocaust survivors inherently entails a translation of sorts before the words even reach the page, since the writer is transforming the unspeakable reality of the camps into language which the reader can access and understand. Some critics go a step further, arguing that ‘every writer is in fact a translator, since his occupation is to transfer facts, experiences, thoughts into another reality – that of language.’⁴¹ However, as humans we are able to co-exist and communicate within our language cultures due to the dense web of words and acknowledged meanings. Where Holocaust expression differs from the gulf between facts, experiences and thoughts on the one hand, and language on the other, is in the fact that the realities of the Holocaust went beyond the web of words in existence, demanding either new language, or a necessary acceptance of approximation. Boase-Beier also discusses the trend among critics to associate translation with a ‘loss’, rather than considering it invaluable to society and our understanding of the world, as well as offering the potential for new and even enhanced forms of expressing an original work.

The sections below will explore the phenomenon of translation, and especially poetry and Holocaust translation, and will aim to justify the assertion that translation is not

³⁹ Boase-Beier, *Translating the Poetry of the Holocaust*, p. 143.

⁴⁰ Boase-Beier, ‘Holocaust Poetry and Translation’, in *Translating Holocaust Lives*, ed. by Davies, Hammel and Winters, p. 155.

⁴¹ Hans Erich Nossack, ‘Translating and Being Translated’, trans. by Sharon Sloan, in *Theories of Translation*, ed. by Schulte and Biguenet, pp. 228-238 (p. 228).

simply 'an integral system within any literary polysystem, but [...] a most active system within it.'⁴² The translation of Holocaust works offers invaluable access to works from different languages and cultures, providing the potential for innovative, expressive and profound additions to the corpus of testimonial works.

3.5 Translation

Traditionally, literary translation has been understudied and underacknowledged – to the extent that practitioners and theoreticians such as Lawrence Venuti have termed the resulting phenomenon the 'translator's invisibility'.⁴³ Since the act of translation is often unacknowledged or only minimally acknowledged, readers tend to view the translation as a practical means of 'reading' the original, without considering the translator as an essential, intermediary figure, and the process of translation as fundamentally and unavoidably interacting with and altering the original.

The translator's lack of visibility is evident from the very moment a book is retrieved in a bookshop or library. The cover and spine of Michael Hamburger's translations of Celan's works,⁴⁴ for example, bear no mention of the translator's name. A reader with limited knowledge of Celan could easily select this volume and assume that the poems contained within were Celan's original language versions.

It is worth questioning why the translator is presented as such a peripheral figure, when in reality their contribution is fundamental: without the translators' efforts the English, Italian and countless other language versions of Celan's poems simply would not exist, and only those able to read German would have access to the poet's works. The translation act frequently remains unacknowledged because translation 'is often thought about in terms of loss and distance from an original'.⁴⁵ The assumption that

⁴² Itamar Even-Zohar, 'The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem', *Poetics Today*, 11:1 (Spring, 1990), 45-51 (p. 46).

⁴³ See Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*.

⁴⁴ The specific version referred to here is the previously cited Paul Celan, *Selected Poems*, trans. by Hamburger.

⁴⁵ Peter Davies, 'Translation and Holocaust Testimonies: a Matter for Holocaust Studies or Translation Studies?', in *Literary Translation: Redrawing the Boundaries*, ed. by Jean Boase-Beier, Antoinette Fawcett and Philip Wilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 204- 218 (p. 207).

translation is tantamount to loss and distance from the original is one which this chapter aims to dispel by demonstrating the nuanced and valuable contributions translators are able to make to our understanding of the original.

The traditional, negative view of translation derives from a lack of understanding of the practice of translation:

There are two assumptions that people commonly make when they speak of translation in contrast to original writing. One is that the translator is subject to constraints which do not apply to the original author. The other is that the act of translation is by nature less creative than the act of writing an original work.⁴⁶

There is, in fact, no factual basis for such assumptions, since a successful translator is, like the original author, a skilled and creative writer, armed with a deep understanding of the languages from which and into which they are translating. There is no set way to translate, and as such the translator has the freedom to translate a given piece in any way they see fit. There are, of course, some expectations of what a successful translation will convey of the original: some degree of resemblance and equivalence is vital in order to retain the fundamental message conveyed by the original, however there are almost infinite ways of achieving this which may variously focus on style, vocabulary, meter, and any other feature(s) of the poet's original.

The issues outlined above – the perceived lack of freedom and constraints of the translator – have perpetuated misconceptions of what translations should aspire to be, as well as the aforementioned invisibility of the translator:

Because translation is conceived as the production of a linguistic equivalent that will substitute for an “original” text, and because the dominant method for rendering such apparent equivalents has been the production of a fluent text that “reads like the original,” the very figure of the translator, as a historical figure exercising creative agency, has been an encumbrance.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Michael Holman and Jean Boase-Beier, ‘Introduction: Writing, Rewriting and Translation Through Constraint to Creativity’, in *The Practices of Literary Translation: Constraints and Creativity*, ed. by Jean Boase-Beier and Michael Holman (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1999), pp. 1-17 (p. 1).

⁴⁷ Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, pp. 2-3.

The translator has become a shadowy figure in literary culture, who is considered in the best cases as offering transparent access to the original, and who, at worst, obstructs a non-native reader's comprehension and/or appreciation of the work. Such a view fails to take into account the translator's expertise, the insights gained through their linguistic endeavour, and the value of a second pair of interpretative eyes on a given text. A translator not only offers the potential for a well-informed and invaluable critical reading companion, but also literally facilitates the emergence of a work into a new language, culture and audience.

The impact of translators on the Holocaust canon, and as a result on the general population's understanding of the atrocity, should not be underestimated, as Naomi Seidman observes:

It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that the international reception of the story of Nazism's Jewish victims [...] depended almost entirely on translation; those testimonies that did not find a voice in translations largely fell into oblivion.⁴⁸

Since most Holocaust survivors were not Italian, and since most Italians are not fluent in Polish, German, Yiddish or the many other languages of survivors, it is a fact that most readers of Holocaust literature in Italy will be relying on translations. In many ways, translation entirely shapes a reader's understanding of the Holocaust, since they encounter only a pre-selected proportion of other language works. The commercial reality of publishing means that only works which have proven successful in their original languages, and which are considered suitable for the new target language, will generally come to be translated. As Seidman observes above, other works will have no such legacy. Yves Bonnefoy's pithy assessment encapsulates why this is the case: '[i]f a work does not compel us, it is untranslatable.'⁴⁹ The works which are translated, therefore, are arguably compelling, at least in the eyes of the translator/publisher, and therefore are likely to represent the more engaging accounts of the Holocaust reality. Translation therefore offers the target language

⁴⁸ Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, p. 201.

⁴⁹ Yves Bonnefoy, 'Translating Poetry', trans. by John Alexander and Clive Wilmer, in *Theories of Translation*, ed. by Schulte and Biguenet, pp. 186-192 (p. 192).

audience a privileged survey of the field, and multiple translations, such as those of Celan's poetry, offer to some degree a guarantee of the original's quality.

The translator's assessment of the original's worth entails a number of demands and challenges. Umberto Eco discusses the various negotiations required of the translator, observing:

Translators must negotiate with the ghost of a distant author, with the disturbing presence of a foreign text, with the phantom of the reader they are translating for. Translation is a negotiation to such an extent that translators must also negotiate with publishers, because a translation may be more or less domesticated or foreignised according to the context in which the book is published, or the age of its expected readers.⁵⁰

Commercial demands inevitably shape a translation, as do the personal preferences, strengths and weaknesses of the translator, since translations are not created by machines working in a vacuum. There are a number of fundamental obligations which a translator must face when embarking on a new translation, although there are no hard and fast rules on the necessary 'compromise between faithfulness and freedom, between the need to be true to one's own and the author's voice.'⁵¹ This dilemma is arguably more significant when the text in question is a Holocaust work written by a survivor. The translator is ethically obliged to 'respect what the author has written.'⁵² Indeed, in Holocaust works it is the substance of what the author has written that often imbues the work with such value in the first place, since this content is unique to the original author, created out of the very extremes of human experience.

Boase-Beier, herself a translator of Celan, writes that:

issues of author 'intention', reader's role and evidence for a chosen interpretation all have to be confronted by a translator. Translation forces us to look at what is being communicated, how, why and to whom.⁵³

⁵⁰ Umberto Eco, *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (Wiedenfeld & Nicolson: London, 2003), p. 173.

⁵¹ Holman and Boase-Beier, 'Introduction', in *The Practices of Literary Translation*, ed. by Boase-Beier and Holman, p. 10.

⁵² Eco, *Mouse or Rat?*, p. 3.

⁵³ Jeane Boase-Beier, 'Knowing and not knowing: style, intention and translation of a Holocaust poem', *Language and Literature*, 13:1 (2004), 25-35 (p. 26).

These issues are the building blocks for a translation which prioritises holistic accuracy beyond literal transliteration. To consider not only the author's content, but also their intentions, necessitates a close and detailed reading of the original. Often, however, such details are not necessarily self-evident and require a judgement call on the part of the translator.

In this way, the translator can be considered a filter, shaping our perception of the original through their own reading. Translated literature 'giunge al suo pubblico filtrate dal punto di vista del traduttore', since:

Un testo, quando viene tradotto, viene influenzato dalla lettura del traduttore che, nel suo lavoro, per quanto cerchi di essere il più oggettivo possibile, lascerà sempre e inevitabilmente qualche traccia della sua soggettività.⁵⁴

Some degree of subjectivity is unavoidable, however this does not necessarily mean a loss or betrayal of the original. The translator, as we have discussed above, is often ideally placed to provide the reader with an invaluable insight into the original, and the nuances of their translation offer an expressive interpretation and potentially an elucidation of the original. Translations are subjective because language is subjective: words have multiple meanings, and literary language in particular often pushes the boundaries of conventional, utilitarian word use. Lawrence Venuti's writing challenges the notion that translation can or should ever aspire to objective transferal of meaning, arguing that this assumes that the:

source text and literature are held to contain invariant features that can be reproduced or transferred in a translation or body of translations. The process of translating shows that invariants do not exist, that the features of the source text must be fixed in an interpretive act, and that any such fixing can only be provisional. A translation can only communicate an interpretation, never the source text itself or some form or meaning believed to be inherent in it.

⁵⁴ D'Eredità, 'Paul Celan in Italia' (unpublished master's thesis), pp. 2-3.

Venuti concludes by inciting translators to 'take responsibility for bringing a foreign text into a different situation by acknowledging that its very foreignness demands cultural innovation.'⁵⁵

Venuti's influential writing on translation is somewhat at odds with another important work: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'. Venuti calls for a celebration of the differences between languages, and the need to create an almost independent work, asserting that movement across languages is not simply the transmutation of 'invariants' but necessitates an act of interpretation; while Benjamin claims that a: 'real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully.'⁵⁶ Benjamin appears here to be calling for a direct and 'transparent' translation which seems to actively discourage the translator's interpretative acts. However, Benjamin continues in such a way as to allow for, even encourage, freedom in translation, commenting:

Just as a tangent touches a circle lightly and at but one point, with this touch rather than with the point setting the law according to which it is to continue on its straight path to infinity, a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux.⁵⁷

Translation is a human activity and as such it is shaped by human subjectivity. Both Venuti, and ultimately Benjamin, profess that successful translation will not only include but celebrate the differences across languages, using interpretation and artistic freedom to formulate a new version of the work in the new language. Literal translation is to be avoided, since 'a translated book that is merely grammatically correct is hardly more than a mannequin draped in the colors of the foreign country. There is no breath of life.'⁵⁸ This is particularly true for poetry, which is a genre rich

⁵⁵ Lawrence Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 191-2.

⁵⁶ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *Theories of Translation*, ed. by Schulte and Biguenet, pp. 79-80.

⁵⁷ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *Theories of Translation*, ed. by Schulte and Biguenet, p. 81.

⁵⁸ Nossack, 'Translating and Being Translated', in *Theories of Translation*, ed. by Schulte and Biguenet, p. 230.

in nuance and detail; and for Holocaust poetry, which relies on being more than just a collection of words, but the provocation of an emotion in the reader, and the introduction of unimaginable images, memories and suffering into a new language context.

3.6 Translating poetry

Translating poetry, as outlined very briefly in the paragraph above, is arguably a more complex endeavour than translating prose, since there are features such as meter, line-breaks and rhyme to consider, in addition to the content and style of the writing. Any translator of poetry must decide – as indeed must the original author – how to balance the style of the poem with the substance. This is particularly pertinent for Holocaust poetry, where it is the interaction between form and content which is often fundamental to conveying the survivor's experiences during the Holocaust.

Different theoreticians inevitably hold different positions on this issue, with Umberto Eco speaking out vociferously in favour of prioritising style:

Now, it is universally acknowledged that in translating poetry one should render as much as possible the effect produced by the sounds of the original text, even though in the change of language a lot of variations are unavoidable. One can miss the real *body* of a discourse, but try at least to preserve, let us say, rhythm and rhyme.⁵⁹

Although presented as fact, Eco's assertion is not without its controversy: what he promotes is not *the* way of translating poetry, but one of many ways of translating poetry, with the ultimate decision hinging, as we have discussed, on the individual translator and their interpretation of the original work. Eco's essay continues in a similarly strident tone, stating:

poetic texts are a sort of touchstone for translation, because they make clear that a translation can be considered absolutely perfect only when it is able in some way to provide an equivalent of the physical substance of expression.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Eco, *Mouse or Rat?*, p. 137.

⁶⁰ Eco, *Mouse or Rat?*, p. 144.

Here Eco introduces the concept of an 'absolutely perfect' translation. Such a notion is evidently problematic, not least because each reader will have their own position on the success, or otherwise, of a translation. Yet, setting aside Eco's bold assertions, one can ascertain that he is in favour of a prioritizing the 'physical' side of the poetry, or, in other words the style of the poem.

Venuti's view of translation contrasts Eco's, since he does not support the notion of a perfect, 'correct' translation, but states that poetry in particular 'can support multiple translations which are extremely different yet equally acceptable as poems or translations, [...] the practice of translation is fundamentally variation.'⁶¹ Venuti's assertion that translation of poetry can produce a wide range of different, but equally acceptable versions holds up in terms of translations of Celan's 'Todesfuge', which have been translated in Italian in a number of different ways by different translators, with each version finding a readership and offering different insights into the original poem.

Boase-Beier also endorses a way of translation which focuses beyond the 'transfer of content', observing:

If poetry, rather than merely documenting or describing, engages the mind, the thought-processes and the emotions of its readers, then the way this happens will be at the heart of the translator's concern with the original text.⁶²

This assessment seems to offer the ideal focus for aspiring translations: looking beyond the traditional dichotomy between style and substance, between form and content, Boase-Beier states that translators should focus on the effect of the poem and how this has been achieved. Translators should attempt to emulate the features of the poem which render it engaging and stimulating. Though arguably a challenging task, since these are conceptual, rather than physical elements of the poem, they are fundamental especially in terms of Holocaust poems such as 'Todesfuge', since it is the engaging, thought-provoking nature of the original which ensures its success as a Holocaust poem. The recreation of this effect is essential to ensuring the Holocaust

⁶¹ Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything*, p. 174.

⁶² Boase-Beier, *Translating the Poetry of the Holocaust*, p. 3.

imperative is fulfilled and the poem will continue to be read by new and wider audiences.

A view which seems to be unanimously held in the field is that translators are, by necessity, exceptionally close readers, since:

to translate is to read in a particularly attentive way, to explore the original for every possible nuance, whether or not it is then possible or desirable to capture all these nuances in the translation.⁶³

When reading a translated poem, the reader can often be both reassured and guided by the translator's attentive reading of the original. The translator effectively adds another layer to the original poem: an added interpretation which, if the translation is successful, ought to comfortably co-exist with the original and be of value to the reader. Boase-Beier argues in favour of the translator's duty to add 'a new voice and perspective to the poetry', since communication is such an essential notion for the majority of survivor-writers.⁶⁴

The crux of Holocaust translation lies in creating a translation which expresses the essence of the original, contributing a new perspective without compromising or altering the authenticity of the original, since Holocaust poems are, predominantly, composed to convey the horror of a real, lived experience, to communicate a 'truth' which translation risks obscuring or even undermining.

The difficulties of translating poetry have led some scholars, including Roman Jakobson, to suggest that: 'poetry by definition is untranslatable.'⁶⁵ Yves Bonnefoy similarly asserts: '[t]he answer to the question, "Can one translate a poem?" is of course no. The translator meets too many contradictions that he cannot eliminate; he must make too many sacrifices.'⁶⁶ While the challenges, indeed even the potential sacrifices, are undeniable, this thesis aims to demonstrate in practical terms through

⁶³ Boase-Beier, 'Bringing Home the Holocaust', p. 223.

⁶⁴ Boase-Beier, 'Holocaust Poetry and Translation', in *Translating Holocaust Lives*, ed. by Davies, Hammel and Winters, p. 162.

⁶⁵ Roman Jakobson, 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation', in *Theories of Translation*, ed. by Schulte and Biguenet, pp. 144-151 (p. 151).

⁶⁶ Bonnefoy, 'Translating Poetry', in *Theories of Translation*, ed. by Schulte and Biguenet, p. 186.

analysis of examples of poetry translation, that such a process is indeed possible, and even desirable. The unique challenges of translating Holocaust poetry and translating Celan – further layers of complexity which demand the careful negotiation of the translator – will be discussed in the following section.

3.7 Translating Celan

Celan, as discussed in section 3.3, earned a reputation as a hermetic poet (albeit a reputation which he challenged), and his work is often considered dense, complex and difficult to understand. His use of imagery is frequently unusual and startling and he consciously constructs a new language to express his experiences, coining new words and forming unprecedented compounds. These features render the translator's task difficult and laborious, demanding increased attention to etymology, lexical decisions and the necessary struggle to understand what Celan intended with his unique style.

Michael Hamburger, who, along with John Felstiner, is one of the most renowned translators of Celan's work into English, discusses the difficulty of Celan's work as something which translators should not seek to overcome, but to understand with as much help from sources and scholars as possible when composing their translations:

it is as a translator [...] that I insist on the essential difficulty and paradox of [Celan's] poetry. These can be illumined, but not resolved or dissolved, by scholarly research. It is the difficulty and the paradox that demands the special attention to every word in his texts⁶⁷

As Hamburger comments later in the introduction to his volume of Celan's translated poems, the survivor-writer 'chose not to help his readers by providing clues to any of his poems in the form of notes',⁶⁸ meaning that the burden of study to illuminate and comprehend Celan's poetry falls to the translator and reader. The lack of notes is also pertinent in our discussion of translation, since it shows Celan's reluctance to provide concrete answers to the questions his poetry raises: by refusing to offer a single, 'correct' explanation, Celan leaves his poetry open to interpretation, and effectively

⁶⁷ Michael Hamburger, 'Introduction', in *Paul Celan*, trans. by Michael Hamburger, pp. 19-34 (p. 20).

⁶⁸ Hamburger, 'Introduction', in *Paul Celan*, trans. by Michael Hamburger, p. 30.

facilitates and encourages the variety of versions translators have produced. The existence of multiple translations in various languages is evidence of the variety of translations a reading of Celan's poetry can produce, each offering a new interpretation of the original.

In the next section we shall encounter four Italian translations of Celan's 'Todesfuge', all of which were presented bilingually in their original publications. This presentation offers the reader, even readers with no knowledge of German, a visual representation of how the translator has tackled the original: whether rhyme, enjambment, punctuation, stanza breaks, even capitalization have been maintained. It gives the reader a sense of whether the translator has taken a literal or a creative approach to translating the original and it also, as Boase-Beier comments, emphasizes the fact that the poem being read is a translation. Boase-Beier continues by stating that this bilingual presentation is not, in itself, enough to focus readers' attention on the processes and reality of translation:

more discussion of the issues facing translators, where the integration of the translator's voice into the finished poem is fully acknowledged and examined, would help to shift attention away from the documentary nature of such poems, important though this undoubtedly is, and towards the consciously communicative acts that not only the original poems but also their translations embody.⁶⁹

This focus, this innovative engagement with translated poems is precisely what we hope to achieve in the following section.

3.8 'Todesfuge'

The four Italian translations analysed in this section are Gilda Musa's 1956 translation, the first published appearance of 'Todesfuge' in the Italian language; the bilingual collaboration between Moshe Kahn and Marcella Bagnasco (1976); Giuseppe Bevilacqua's 1998 translation; and Dario Borso's translation, published by Einaudi in 2016.⁷⁰ These four collections vary widely in their physical presentation.

⁶⁹ Boase-Beier, 'Holocaust Poetry and Translation', in *Translating Holocaust Lives*, ed. by Davies, Hammel and Winters, p. 163.

⁷⁰ For the sake of brevity, when quoting from the different translations the translators' initials and line number(s) will be provided in parenthesis, within the text.

While each adopts a bilingual presentation with facing page translations, Musa's work is an anthology of postwar German poems; Kahn and Bagnasco present a selection of Celan's poetry in a mid-length book of 229 pages with an introduction by German literature scholar, Kahn. Within this collection of poems, 'Todesfuge' appears on page 49; Bevilacqua's offering is an anthology of all of Celan's poems, presented in chronological order and separated into the different volumes of Celan's original published poems. As such, within this lengthy book, which numbers well over 1,000 pages, 'Todesfuge' appears in 'Papavero e memoria'. Finally, Dario Borso's recent translation is entitled *La sabbia delle urne*, and is a translation of Celan's first collection of poems, *Der Sand aus den Urnen* (1948). Borso writes:

Fra il 1947 e il 1948, dopo avere lasciato Bucarest, Celan visse qualche mese a Vienna e cercò di pubblicare la sua prima raccolta di poesie. Un tentativo iniziale abortì in bozze, ma un secondo sembrò andare a buon fine e il libro fu stampato in 500 copie numerate. Con questo libro Celan intendeva esordire sulla scena letteraria di lingua tedesca, ma quando si accorse della quantità di refuse impose all'editore di non distribuire il volume.

Dunque *La sabbia delle urne* è un libro fantasma, che Celan non ristampò mai, ma fece rifluire parzialmente in pubblicazioni successive.⁷¹

Borso's volume offers the first Italian translations of this collection of Celan's earliest poems, as well as *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (1952), translated as *Papavero e memoria*. 'Todesfuge' is the final poem in the main body of the book – other poems are included in the Appendix – and is afforded its own section, which indicates its significance and status in Celan's early writings. Like Borso, Gilda Musa's text also highlights 'Todesfuge' for special attention, signaling its primacy among the other poems by Celan by placing it first of the author's poems in the anthology.

The analysis of these four different versions will focus on five core translation cruxes: fundamental elements of the poem where Celan's German original is particularly open to interpretation and where, as a result, a wider range of translations naturally occur. These cruxes exemplify both the challenges and potential rewards of translation, as well as the benefit of reading different translations in tandem in order

⁷¹ Dario Borso, 'Il libro', in Paul Celan, *La sabbia delle urne*, trans. by Dario Borso (Turin: Einaudi, 2016), Kindle location 1815.

to deepen one's understanding of the original poem. Analysing different translations side by side is not only a valuable practice for translators themselves, but also for readers. Jean Boase-Beier uses an example from 'Todesfuge' to demonstrate how comparative study assists in textual analysis and critical reading,⁷² and it is this approach which will be adopted and extended in this chapter to elucidate how four Italian translators have tackled Celan's poem and how the different versions contribute new meanings and interpretations to our understanding of the powerful original.

Diletta D'Eredità has also worked closely on Italian translations of Celan's poetry, outlining a selection process analogous to that used in this thesis:

Poiché l'interesse che si va diffondendo verso la produzione celaniana sta moltiplicando le traduzioni disponibili, soprattutto attraverso pubblicazioni all'interno del web, per circoscrivere la scelta dei testi da analizzare sono state confrontate tra loro solamente le traduzioni più "autorevoli", realizzate da specialisti e traduttori esperti, pubblicate in antologie, riviste o raccolte di poesie.⁷³

Unlike D'Eredità's discussion, only those translations published in books as single or co-translated editions were included for analysis in this thesis. D'Eredità's approach, to compare the versions in order to 'decostruire il testo tradotto, scoprire la strategia adottata e individuare gli elementi problematici particolarmente connotati', which she terms 'veri nodi traduttivi',⁷⁴ is similar to the strategies adopted here. The unique contribution of this chapter, aside from the inclusion of Dario Borso's recent translation, and indeed what sets this thesis apart as a whole, is the depth of analysis offered: the metrical, lexical and stylistic deconstruction of the poems assessed, which provides the reader with more than just a commentary on the works, but a real, practical elucidation of how the poetry creates the effects that other scholars simply refer to. This more focused and concentrated analysis affords a greater understanding of how poetry, and in this chapter *translated* poetry, is able to communicate the essential and unique features of Holocaust poetry. In this thesis the

⁷² Boase-Beier, *Translating the Poetry of the Holocaust*, p. 78.

⁷³ D'Eredità, 'Paul Celan in Italia' (unpublished master's thesis), p. 6.

⁷⁴ D'Eredità, 'Paul Celan in Italia' (unpublished master's thesis), p. 6.

analysis of Italian translations of Celan's 'Todesfuge' also forms part of the wide-ranging overview of Italian Holocaust poetry in all its various permutations, which is the first of its kind, going beyond issues of translation to include survivorship, art's post-Auschwitz imperatives and online poetry about the Holocaust.

When approaching 'Todesfuge', the very first point of interest and translation crux is the title itself, which is a surprising new word, created by Celan. However, in addition to considering the novelty and complexity of this German title, we must also remember that this work first appeared in print in Romanian, and its first published title was, therefore, 'not the now famous "Todesfuge," but the Romanian "Tangoul Mortii" (Tango of Death)'.⁷⁵ This first title clearly references the tango, a specific form of music and dance which was popular in the early 20th century, and whose evocation of the dance hall, energy and even flirtation, is starkly at odds with 'death' and the camps. Though appearing incongruous to the reader, Felstiner comments on the morbid aptness of the term, which actually imbued Celan's work with credibility and authenticity:

At Auschwitz too the orchestra played tangos, and prisoners elsewhere used the term "Death Tango" for whatever music was being played when the Germans took a group out to be shot. So Celan's early title, "Todestango," gave his poem the ring of reliable evidence: that this person knew whereof he spoke, that he was surely there and must have written the poem there.⁷⁶

By the time Celan came to publish his poem in German, however, he had devised a new title, 'Todesfuge'. While this term remains an unusual pairing of music and death, 'fugue' is arguably a particularly apt musical term to describe both the camps, and Celan's depiction of the relentless monotony of life (and death) during the Holocaust. The fugue, a musical form originating in the Baroque period, uses counterpoint to create a polyphonic layering of iterations of the same theme in different pitches in order to form a single harmonic whole. In many ways, this musical structure is a metaphor for how the inmates worked alongside one another, all different, but all victims of the Nazi atrocity, forced to work to death towards the

⁷⁵ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, p. 28.

⁷⁶ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, p. 30.

‘Final Solution’. It is also worth considering that arguably the most famous proponent of the fugue, composer Johann Sebastian Bach, was German, and therefore the term also holds connotations of national pride and identity which tie in with Nazi ideology and which compliment Celan’s relentless focus on the German-ness of the Holocaust.

Another notable feature of the change from ‘tango’ to ‘fugue’ is that it enacts a shift away from a term which has both physical and aural associations (dance and music) to solely aural connotations. ‘Fugue’ forces the reader to consider the musicality of the poem which follows, and – like the musical form – Celan’s poem is structured around a number of repeating lines. Translators and critics have focused on the musicality of ‘Todesfuge’ in varying degrees. For Italy’s first translator, Gilda Musa, it was of paramount importance:

Traducendo la Musa cerca di ricreare lo stesso carattere ritmico e musicale dei versi di Celan, influenzata sia dalla sua attività di poetessa, sia dall’importanza che attribuisce alla musicalità del verso. L’elemento musicale viene sottolineato in prima luogo traducendo il titolo con *Fuga sul tema morte*.⁷⁷

Musa is the only translator to present the title in this way. Arguably ‘Fuga sul tema morte’ loses much of the surprising alacrity and incongruity of Celan’s single compound noun, yet Musa’s use of the word ‘tema’ is the appropriate term to describe the repeated refrains present in the fugue, and as such she highlights the inevitability, repetition and ubiquity of death, both in the poems and in the camps.

Moshe Kahn and Marcella Bagnasco, and Dario Borso translate the title as ‘Fuga di morte’; while Giuseppe Bevilacqua’s version is entitled ‘Fuga della morte’, translations which more closely convey the brevity of Celan’s title. As translator John Felstiner comments, the title is a source of continued debate:

What is this absurd genitive, this irreconcilable compound? “Fugue of Death,” a correct translation, loses the accentual (and atrocious) symmetry of *Tó-des fú-ge*, while also loosening the German’s possessive’s compactness – the compact between death and music, nullity and order, which are the word’s two sides. Yet “Death Fugue” does not convey the sense of belonging, a train

⁷⁷ D’Eredità, ‘Paul Celan in Italia’ (unpublished master’s thesis), p. 9.

of events belonging to death. “Death’s Fugue” sounds disjointed, and “Deathsfugue” coins too strange an equivalent.⁷⁸

Due to the structure of Italian, these later translated versions of the title do encapsulate the sense of belonging, with ‘di’ and ‘della’ performing this function. Kahn and Bagnasco’s, and Borso’s version, ‘Fuga di morte’, most succinctly echoes the rhythm of the German ‘Todesfuge’ (xuxu), scanning as xuuxu, compared to ‘Fuga della morte’ (xuuuxu) (GB) and ‘Fuga sul tema morte’ (xuuxuxu) (GM). None of the translations achieve the purity of Celan’s single word title, but all find a different way of conveying the significance: the grotesque uniting of music and death which pervades this poem, in its rhythm, its sounds and the singing, playing and whistling he describes within the camp universe.

If the title presents readers with a startling concept, and striking compounding of music and death, the first two words of the poem are a similar assault on the reader, challenging comprehension and norms. Lines 1-3 of the poem form the second point for analysis, introducing the first of a number of complex and startling images which are typical of Celan, and which challenge not only the translator, but the expectations of the reader.

Celan’s ‘Todesfuge’ begins with the word ‘Schwarze’ (‘Black’), which Kahn and Bagnasco and Bevilacqua recreate in their poems, by reversing the noun + adjective word order which is typical in Italian. This allows for the connotations of death, decay and destruction to assault the reader from the very beginning of the poem. Bevilacqua goes slightly further to shock the reader, using the term ‘Negro’, which is not used in standard Italian to refer simply to the colour, but as a racial denominator – a difference which does not exist in English. Bevilacqua’s decision to opt for this interpretation is perhaps a commentary on the Nazi Aryan aspirations, and the many forms of discrimination which continue to exist to the present day. Musa’s and Borso’s translations of this first line are identical, and offer a far more unchallenging

⁷⁸ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, pp. 32-3.

rendering: maintaining normal Italian word order, and beginning 'Latte nero', which slightly normalizes the startling item being described: 'black milk'.

The translations offer a range of different approaches to convey the repetition of the action of drinking, as well as different ways to refer to the passage of time within the camps – the reference points which shape the day. Musa again inverts the order of the original, presenting these temporal markers in chronological order: 'mattino', followed by 'mezzogiorno', and finally 'notte'. This creates an all-encompassing arc of time which neatly encapsulates the workers' day. The three later translators maintain Celan's original ordering, with Kahn and Bagnasco using the same everyday language as Musa (and Celan), Borso offers 'mezzodí', a more colloquial word choice; while Bevilacqua opts for the more literary term 'meriggio'. Bevilacqua's decision to use a more unusual term demonstrates his deliberate attention to and precise selection of his language: which renders his inclusion of 'Negro' as the first word of the poem all the more surprising.

Interestingly, there are three different translations of l. 3: 'beviamo beviamo' (GM), 'beviamo e beviamo' (MK & MB, DB) and 'noi beviamo e beviamo' (GB). The brevity and concision of Musa's version conveys the urgency of the drinkers' action, the need for sustenance, even of the most unnatural and repellant form. Kahn and Bagnasco's and Borso's translations perform a similar function, with the inclusion of 'e' which echoes Celan's 'und' and stresses the continuity of the action, its ongoing nature. This 'e' would become elided in a spoken rendition of the poem, to present the same mirrored uxuuxu rhythm as Musa's and Celan's original line. John Felstiner comments:

Our closest access to "Todesfuge" comes by way of its rhythm, driven by repetitive risings and fallings:

wir trinken und trinken

we drink [it] and drink [it]

When Germans and others listen to Celan's recorded voice, they are drawn into its intensifying cadences. Some are beguiled, others abruptly enlisted, as the inexorable beat forms this lyric's prevalent metaphor. Rhythm and repetition take in every other element of "Todesfuge".⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, p. 27.

As Felstiner, a seasoned translator of Celan's work, asserts, rhythm is essential to 'Todesfuge', especially in this opening section, which will be repeated throughout the poem, just like the subject of a fugue. The translations by Musa, Kahn and Bagnasco, and Borso faithfully recreate this rhythm, and therefore reproduce for the reader the hypnotic beat of Celan's original.

Like Kahn and Bagnasco's and Borso's version, Bevilacqua's translation also includes 'e', in addition to 'noi', which he uses throughout the first three lines, unlike the other translators. This repeated 'noi' serves to stress the presence of the drinkers, their humanity and solidity. This 'we' is relentless and inescapable and calls the reader's attention to the physicality of the victims of the Holocaust.

It is the following line, line four, of the poem which provides the next core translation crux. Jean Boase-Beier discusses this line in her work *Translating the Poetry of the Holocaust*, pointing out the variations that English translations have engendered:

The striking differences, apart from the rhythm, are in the verb 'shovel' or 'dig' (for 'schaufeln'), in 'air' or 'breezes' (for 'Lüften') and in 'cramped' or 'unconfined' (for 'eng').⁸⁰

It is interesting to note that 'schaufeln', 'Lüften' and 'eng' have not caused similar differences in the Italian translations discussed here, all of which offer 'scaviamo', 'aria' and 'stretti' or 'stretto' respectively. However, this line does introduce differences which are indicative of the range of interpretations held by the various translators. Gilda Musa's version arguably moves furthest away from a literal translation of Celan's original. Musa's line begins with 'col badile', introducing an implement which is absent from Celan's poem, and she uses 'fossa' ('pit') as opposed to the term 'tomba', which occurs in the other three translations, Musa's decision slightly detracts from the overt reference to death entailed in 'Grab', though her translation, which is largely anapaestic, as if rhythmically enacting the shoveling of the inmates, repeats 'una fossa' whose rhythm drives the line forward and highlights the relentless focus of the prisoners on the digging of the pit. Musa's line finishes

⁸⁰ Boase-Beier, *Translating the Poetry of the Holocaust*, p. 54.

‘non si sta stretti’, as does Dario Borso’s, and her decision to use the verb ‘stare’, unlike ‘giacere’, which the other translations favour, further removes the line from the tomb-like quality of Celan’s original.

Borso’s translation is a hybrid between Kahn and Bagnasco, beginning identically with ‘scaviamo una tomba’; and Musa’s, finishing ‘lì non si sta stretti’. The only unique element of Borso rendering is his description of the tombs being built ‘*per aria*’ (my emphasis) which, like his use of *mezzodì* in line two, imbues his translation with a more colloquial feel, which emphasizes the familiarity and normality of those singled out by the Nazis for destruction: Borso reminds readers that the workers and victims are just like us. Kahn and Bagnasco and Bevilacqua’s versions are similar in many respects, although Bevilacqua’s begin with the ‘noi’ which he repeats throughout his translation, to reinforce the physical presence of the workers. Its use at the start of this line is particularly pertinent, since it ties in with another feature unique to this translation: unlike Musa, Borso and Kahn and Bagnasco, who use the impersonal ‘si sta’/ ‘si giace’, Bevilacqua’s line establishes a definitive distance and difference between the ‘noi’ of the gravediggers, and the ‘voi’ who will be occupying the tombs. This difference is also present in English translations, and the lack of clarity is a key feature of the original:

there is uncertainty about whose voice we hear and therefore to whom the repeated words about death ‘da liegt man nicht eng’ [...] can be attributed. These words, which can be translated as ‘there you won’t lie so tight’ [...], could be those uttered ironically by a concentration camp guard, or they could be the thoughts attributed to the guard by the camp inmates [...], or indeed the thoughts of the camp inmates themselves, who long for death. Whether the translator feels the attribution is clear, or is ambiguous and should be left for the reader to make, might determine whether words that could actually be said [...] [as in Bevilacqua’s translation] are used in the English version, or words that would be unlikely to be spoken and do not suggest irony, as in Michael Hamburger’s choice of ‘there one lies unconfined’ [similarly, Musa’s, Kahn and Bagnasco’s, and Borso’s translations] [...], which are more likely to be read as the represented thoughts of the prisoners.⁸¹

⁸¹ Boase-Beier, ‘Holocaust Poetry and Translation’, in *Translating Holocaust Lives*, ed. by Davies, Hammel and Winters, p. 158.

Each translation offers a different version of this line, which will repeat in various forms throughout the poem.

Line 16 offers our next point for discussion, although in Bevilacqua's version, which introduces a line-break and therefore an extra line to the poem in line 7, this falls on line 17. Musa begins this new stanza *in media res*, with 'E', contributing to the acceleration building in the poem, which begins to break down into repeated segments of earlier parts of the poem. Musa, who as we discussed above was particularly attentive to the musicality of the piece, further adds to this sensation by using a number of anapaests in this line, which create a rising rhythm. Musa, like Borso, repeats the verb 'scavare', used as we have seen in line four, while the two other translations, and indeed Celan's original version, use synonyms. Musa's and Borso's decision to use 'scavate' highlights the repetitive actions of the workers, and complements Celan's use of repetition throughout the poem, although it fails to introduce additional nuances to the poem, as the introduction of new vocabulary has the potential to do.

Kahn and Bagnasco begin the stanza with 'Lui', while Bevilacqua opts for the more literary 'Egli', both of which establish that the speaker is the (male) guard alluded to elsewhere in the poem. Bevilacqua uses the verb 'puntate' as a synonym for 'scavate' (or indeed 'vangate', as adopted by Kahn and Bagnasco). This selection is particularly noteworthy because it not only means 'dig', but also 'aim', which ties in with the addition of 'nel cuor' which Bevilacqua makes to this line. The translator therefore enacts a double dying: not only are the inmates digging graves – perhaps even their own – but in doing so they are aiming their implements for the heart. They are incited to attack the earth with the same brutality with which they are treated. This meaning is not explicit in Celan's poem, but in a work in which sinister violence is omnipresent, the interpretation seems a valid attempt to create the intended effect of the original in Italian.

Again, Borso's translation echoes elements of the other versions, whether consciously, or simply by virtue of being the most recent translator to tackle the poem. His version is unique in that the line begins immediately with the verb 'Grida'

which, even more so that Musa's translation, immediately immerses the reader in the action. Borso's translation is also unlike the others in that he writes 'scavate di più', as opposed to 'più *a fondo*' (my emphasis). This rendering lacks the spatial dimension of the others, which is important considering that what is being dug is a grave. Indeed, his decision to translate as 'scavate di più il terreno' lacks much of the sinister undertones of death that the other translators – and particularly Bevilacqua – strive for. Borso's language choice mitigates the horror of the original and further emphasizes the quotidian nature of the manual labour, focusing on the harsh and relentless conditions, rather than the shocking cruelty of the prisoners being made to dig (their own) graves.

Musa's version is, like elsewhere in her translation, very concise, and she writes 'cantate suonate' without an intervening conjunction which both contributes to the accelerating rhythm of the poem and conveys the barking orders of the guard who issues commands without pause or hesitation. Interestingly, Musa concludes the order to sing [and] play 'fra voi', which translates as 'amongst yourselves', implying that this musical accompaniment is for the benefit of the workers and not for the morbid entertainment of the guard as the infamous prison orchestras arguably were. Musa's rendering also removes the distinction, present in the other translations, between the workers digging and another group of workers performing. The effect of this is that the music in Musa's version is presented as the diggers' own entertainment, as a working ditty to accompany their relentless digging, not dissimilar to whistling a tune to while away the working hours. This image makes the music companionable, even comforting. In Kahn and Bagnasco's, Bevilacqua's and Borso's versions there is a clear separation between the workers and the musicians, enacted by 'vangate [...] voi e voi cantate e suonate' (MK & MB), 'voialtri cantate e suonate' (GB) and 'voi altri cantate e suonate' (DB) which creates the impression of the music as a haunting accompaniment to the diggers, whose only noise is the repetitive digging of the earth. This uncomfortable image, in which the guard seeks to elevate the horrid task of digging graves to the level of theatrical entertainment for his own diversion, sits well with Celan's original, which challenges the reader's

notions of normality and decency from the very beginning: attempting to introduce them in some small way to the horror of the camps.

The final section for discussion is ll. 24-6 of 'Todesfuge'. At this point, it is essential to highlight that Dario Borso's translated volume, *La sabbia delle urne*, does not in fact present the full text of 'Todesfuge'. Both the German version and the facing Italian translation miss out ll. 19-23 of Celan's original. Since there is no discussion of this decision, it must be assumed that this is a serious editorial oversight. As a result of missing out this section, Borso's version presents the lines discussed here as following on from and in the same stanza as 'stecht tiefer die Spaten ihr einen ihr andern spielt weiter zum Tanz auf' (l. 18). By omitting this section of the original poem, Borso's version reduces the impact of the building repetition which is an essential component of the cumulative disintegration of 'Todesfuge', enacting the workers' own physical demise.

This section begins by echoing line 16, with 'Grida' (GM, DB), 'Lui grida' (MK & MB) and 'Egli grida' (GB), each translation maintaining their chosen style and the effects it creates, as discussed above. This line is one hotly debated by translators, including John Felstiner, who comments on Celan's use of the word 'Deutschland': 'why translate Deutschland, drilled into everyone by Nazism's "Deutschland, Deutschland, über Alles."'"⁸² Celan's line 'der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland' is an explicit tying of Germany to the atrocities, to death itself, and as Felstiner argues, 'Deutschland' is a term which would be understood almost universally if left in the original German. None of the Italian translators choose to do so, however, and they translate this phrase as 'la morte è maestro nata in Germania', 'la morte è un maestro Tedesco', 'la morte è un Maestro di Germania' and – echoing Kahn and Bagnasco's translation, 'la morte è un maestro tedesco' respectively. Bevilacqua's is the closest translation, in literal terms, and his capitalization of 'Maestro' conveys the gravity of the title, as well as echoing Celan's own German presentation. Kahn and Bagnasco and Borso do not use the word 'Germany', but rather describe death as a 'German maestro', with the bilingual pairing capitalizing this word to emphasise its significance. Electing not

⁸² Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, p. 36.

to use the word 'Germany' loses the visual and sense impact of Celan's original, which not only makes death German, but inextricably ties the whole of 'Deutschland' to death itself by placing the two nouns in such close proximity. Musa's translation captures some of this essence, since she is the only translator to ensure agreement between the feminine 'morte', 'maestra' and 'nata', which entails the repetition of the concluding 'a' sound, tying together the words ever more closely. There is also a satisfying symmetry between Musa's choice of 'nata', which suggests that death is born in Germany: rendering the country the creator of death.

In the second line of this section both Musa, Kahn and Bagnasco, and Borso elect to repeat exactly the start of the line above, which adds to the growing repetition of the poem which begins to break down into almost incoherence from this point onwards, with repeated snippets interrupting the flow of the sense units. Bevilacqua drops 'Egli' from l. 25 of his translation and begins simply with 'grida', this omission emphasizing the urgency of the guard's continued command. The language Bevilacqua uses further dramatizes the guard's violent directness, and he shouts 'cavate ai violini suono più oscuro', inciting the prisoners to 'extract' the music from the violins, which holds connotations of force and of an action being carried out against the will of the other.

Kahn and Bagnasco reuse 'suonate', echoing l. 16, while Musa's translation offers a more delicate interpretation, with the verb 'sfiorate' which implies a lightness of touch, and almost a tenderness, making the content of the guard's order slightly at odds with his shouting delivery. Borso's translation, 'archeggiate' creates a similar effect, with the guard inciting the players to 'bow' their violins. This rendering stresses the physical practicalities of the violin as an instrument, transforming the workers into proper musicians, whose two hands are occupied in making music. The gentleness of Musa's translation, and the formality of Borso's creates a sense of incongruity which certainly has a place in a translation of Celan's poetry, which from the very first words presents unusual and discomfiting images, and their particular word choices give the uncomfortable impression that the guard is deriving genuine musical enjoyment from the macabre performance.

While the final line of this section largely repeats the language used in l. 4, it is now in the 'nubi' – or, in Borso's translation, 'nuvole' – that the dead will reside, rather than in the grave dug into the earth. Musa, Kahn and Bagnasco, and Borso all use the verb 'salire' to describe the dead rising into the clouds, which suggests not only the ascension of the (worthy) dead into Heaven, but also alludes to an inescapable image in the Holocaust context of the smoke rising from the crematoria. Bevilacqua's translation of 'andrete' loses these connotations, although the following reference to 'fumo nell'aria' makes the link to human ash explicit.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the topic of translation, with the specific example of Paul Celan's 'Todesfuge' as translated by Gilda Musa, Moshe Kahn and Marcella Bagnasco, Giuseppe Bevilacqua and, most recently, Dario Borso. We have seen how fundamental, although misunderstood, translation has been in the Holocaust context – introducing new audiences to vital works and ensuring that the survivor-writers' desire to inform and commemorate is enacted on an increasingly large scale.

Paul Celan, like Edith Bruck, lived out his post-liberation years in a different country to that of his life before incarceration. Unlike, Bruck, however, he resolutely maintained use of his mother tongue for his literary works in order to constantly reiterate the German-ness of the Nazi crime and his belief that German was the only language appropriate for discussing the events of the Holocaust. While for Bruck the pre-war mother tongue was too painful to use, for Celan it was a necessity, even a proud demonstration that the Nazis had not succeeded in eradicating Europe's Jewish population, and a powerful demonstration of how a Jewish writer could subjugate the German language to convey what he had suffered during the Holocaust. Celan's commitment to creating new language to convey the horrors of Auschwitz demonstrates how he was driving the German language away from the past, to a new function of commemoration.

Translation, as discussed in section 3.5, is traditionally associated with a loss and a distance from the original work, and as a result is often viewed in negative terms. This chapter has demonstrated how the differences inherent both between the

translation and the original, and between translations, can be thought of in positive terms, since they represent the various interpretations of the translators as valuable, informed and careful readers.

The four translations discussed in this chapter are spaced almost equidistantly over a period of over 60 years, and with this passage of time we witness the growing commercial allure of Paul Celan, with major Italian publisher Mondadori printing the second and third translations, after Musa's modest first publication. Dario Borso's 2016 translation is evidence of a growing audience which is receptive even to Celan's most unknown, early collection of poems, *Der Sand aus den Urnen*. We also witness the growing understanding of Celan's historical and literary significance, and the later translations, especially Bevilacqua's, benefit from this acknowledgement of Celan's importance within the Holocaust canon. Kahn and Bagnasco, Bevilacqua and even more so, Borso, were translating with access to a wide body of literature on Celan and 'Todesfuge'. For this reason, it is perhaps unsurprising that the most recent translation has the least to offer readers in terms of originality, and often reads like an amalgamation of the previous translations. Musa, as a pioneering translation of Celan, did not have this wealth of material available to her when her version was composed and published.

Although we have focused only on four short sections from the poem, as well as discussing the translation of the title 'Todesfuge', this analysis has demonstrated the main textual variances across the four published Italian translations of Celan's poem. Many lines of Celan's poem, such as the haunting repeated refrain, which in fact concludes the poem, 'dein goldenes Haar Margarete/dein aschenes Haar Sulamith', do not vary across the four translations.⁸³ Such examples of similar, or indeed almost-identical renderings, have little to offer the reader in terms of comparative analysis, and naturally often arise when Celan's original writing is at its most easily comprehensible and least open to interpretation. The notion of translation cruxes: areas when translations diverge and differences emerge, tend to alert the reader to

⁸³ In this example the only difference between the three translations is Musa's decision to Italianise the name 'Sulamith' to 'Sulamita', which the other translators have left in the German original.

points in the original when Celan's language and the images and concepts he introduces are at their most challenging. As Boase-Beier comments, '[t]he very fact that there are these striking differences suggests [a] line is crucial.'⁸⁴ At these points reading different interpretations is valuable since this enables the reader to build up a greater picture of the various meanings held in Celan's offering.

In this chapter we have considered, therefore, the crucial sections of Celan's poem, and demonstrated the range of possible and valid translations offered by these professional translators. Such differences arise naturally, due to the individual's interpretation of the original. Felstiner comments that '[t]here are at least fifteen published English translations of "Todesfuge," [...] Practically every word, phrase, and cadence broaches questions for the translator.'⁸⁵ The decisions the translator makes in response to these questions are informative to readers, especially when different translations are read in parallel.

The four translations not only represent the four published versions of Celan's poem, but the evolution of the poem in Italy over the decades. Musa's early translation was composed before the explosion of interest in the Holocaust which came in the 1960s and 1970s, and which even penetrated popular music (see Chapter 2). Arguably this lack of public awareness surrounding Celan and 'Todesfuge' afforded Musa the freedom to approach the poem without public expectations. She was able to write without the pressure of the reader's preconceptions or interpretations, and while being the first translator to introduce the poem to an Italian readership inevitably held obligations and responsibilities, it also offered her an unparalleled autonomy. It is perhaps due to this freedom that Musa's translation often varies more noticeably from Kahn and Bagnasco's, Bevilacqua's and Borso's later renderings. Musa's translation is often more concise and more rhythmically driven than the other translations, demonstrating her appreciation and fascination with the poem's musicality – a feature to which she draws attention in the very title itself.

⁸⁴ Boase-Beier, *Translating the Poetry of the Holocaust*, p. 79.

⁸⁵ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, p. 32.

Moshe Kahn's and Marcella Bagnasco's translation is unique in this discussion, as it is a collaborative effort between a German and an Italian native speaker. Given the contribution of a German mother tongue, it is not surprising that the syntax of this offering is often very close to Celan's original poem. This translation was published in 1976, during a period when popular interest in the Holocaust was high and written works and television programmes (such as the American mini-series 'Holocaust' (1978)) on the Nazi atrocity proliferated. A reflection of this booming interest, and commerciality of the Holocaust, this translation by Kahn and Bagnasco was the first time the poem was printed in Italy by a leading publisher. In many ways, this translation is a middle ground between Musa's translation and Bevilacqua's version, and the careful attention to accurate linguistic translation means there is often less to be said about this faithful rendition. The chief focus of this translation seems to have been linguistic, and a desire to ensure the accuracy of the language transfer from German to Italian: a worthy aim considering the imperative to maintain the authenticity of the original when translating Holocaust works.

Bevilacqua's version, published in a scholarly edition of Celan's works, demonstrates the translator's formal style. He repeats literary forms such as 'Egli' throughout the poem and often selects erudite language which recreates the complexity of Celan's language. The decision to use formal, literary language is perhaps a reflection of Celan's status at Bevilacqua's time of writing: by the 1990s Celan was firmly established as a key member of the literary canon. Bevilacqua's word choices often set him apart from the other translators, beginning with the very first word of the poem, and his selection of 'Negro' which challenges the expectations of even the late-twentieth century reader who is likely to be familiar with Celan's work.

Borso's translation bears many similarities to the previous three published translations, with the most striking difference being the omission of lines 19-23 of the original poem. This absence fundamentally affects the resulting translation, since it diminishes the effect of Celan's building repetition in 'Todesfuge', affecting the flow and rhythm of the poem. Although 'Todesfuge' is afforded its own section in Borso's volume, the translator makes clear in his notes on the text that the driving force behind this edition was to present Celan's earliest collection of poems, *Der Sand aus*

den Urnen, in Italian for the first time. As such, we might infer that the oversight in 'Todesfuge' came about because this poem was not a particular focus for the translator, although paradoxically, its placement in the volume implies Borso's acknowledgment of its importance within Celan's early poetry.

All four translations are faithful to the fugue-like quality of Celan's original, a feature which has also struck musicians, such as Andrea Cauduro:

Col tempo, approfondendo i miei studi musicali, cominciai ad apprezzare non solo la profondità e la sensibilità con cui Celan affronta il tema della Shoah, ma anche l'estrema raffinatezza tecnica con cui riesce a richiamare attraverso l'uso della parola l'idea della fuga⁸⁶

The translators maintain the driving repetition of Celan's 'Todesfuge' which ebbs and flows and builds to a crescendo, concluding with those lines which almost require no translation, and which resonate in both the German original, and in these translations.

These four translations all offer more than a simple literal transfer, showing careful attention to detail and word choice, and a desire to recreate the effect and intention of Celan's original, which was to disturb and discomfort the reader, and offer an unflinching account of some of the most inhuman sufferings of the inmates. The Italian translations discussed here adhere to the ideal form of translation promoted by scholars such as Benjamin and Venuti: they offer new versions of the original which acknowledge and celebrate the differences across the languages. In this poem style and substance: which often compete for supremacy when a work comes to be translated, are inextricably linked in the breakdown and fragmentation of the sense-units in the poem, and this gradual destruction of the verse is acknowledged and successfully recreated by each of the translators.

These translations, rather than constituting a loss when compared to Celan's original, reflect the careful attention of German literature experts to this pivotal work in the Holocaust canon. Each translation offers a unique insight into 'Todesfuge', with

⁸⁶ Andrea Cauduro, 'Comporre dopo (e durante) la Shoah', in *Paul Celan in Italia*, ed. by D'Eredità, Miglio and Zimarri, pp. 105-111 (p. 106).

Musa's early version emphasizing the musicality and the driving rhythm of the original, recreating these effects for the Italian audience. Kahn and Bagnasco focus on linguistic accuracy, presenting a work which most closely conveys the nuanced and precise vocabulary chosen by Celan to express the horror of the Holocaust. Bevilacqua's rendition is faithful to the complexity of 'Todesfuge' and its dense and unexpected use of language – it is a markedly literary translation which pays homage to the man who was to become one of the most celebrated survivor-writers of the Holocaust. Finally, Borso's translation seems to offer an amalgamation of all that has come before, demonstrating a preference for quotidian language which stresses the recognizable familiarity of the victims, who are just like us. Borso's linguistic choices also stress the way in which the Nazis sought to systematically destroy their victims through relentless toil and repeated overwork. The translations, especially when read in parallel as in this chapter, offer a broad and insightful account of Celan's original, each prioritising and highlighting a different crucial element of his writing. Each does justice to 'Todesfuge' and adds to our appreciation of this complex and compelling poem. Though their emphasis varies, each version conveys the essence of the original without compromising the authenticity of Celan's haunting voice in 'Todesfuge', and the contributions of these translators open up this fundamental Holocaust work to a wider, Italian readership.

Chapter 4 AUSCHWITZ ONLINE: INTERNET POETRY ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

4.1 Introduction

With the exception of Francesco Guccini's *canzoni d'autore* (Chapter 2), all of the poetry studied thus far has emerged from a centuries-old print publishing culture, in which an author's poetry is subject to editorial scrutiny, scholarly attention and popular judgment. Guccini's work does not adhere to the print-based model, since his lyrics are primarily accessed aurally by listeners, rather than visually by readers; however, the survivor poetry (Chapter 1), lyric poetry (Chapter 2) and translation poems (0) addressed in this thesis have all undergone the same process of pre-publication preparation, which ensures that the resulting version is reviewed, edited and final. In chapter 4 we'll be looking at a new medium for the creation and dissemination of poetry: the internet. By analysing the works of a contemporary online poet, we'll explore how the new authorial possibilities, reader interactions and technical issues of online poetry shape some of the most recent poetry about the Holocaust.

The standard model of print-based publication, in which the works are subject to professional editorial assessment and peer review, has the aim of guaranteeing the integrity and technical skill of the poetry which reaches the shelves in bookstores. The process of publication, with its editorial hurdles, is part of what imbues the published works and their authors with prestige and recognition. Increasingly, however, since the advent of the internet, such editorial intervention and validation is easily sidestepped, and the phenomenon of self-publishing online has grown exponentially in the last two decades. The internet provides aspiring writers with a wide range of possibilities for self-publication, from personal blogs to websites which host hundreds of thousands of works. This chapter will focus on an example of the latter category, the website www.scrivere.info,¹ and will explore how poetry about

¹ Henceforth 'Scrivere'.

the Holocaust functions within this large and active Italian online community of readers and writers.

Since online writing is a relatively new phenomenon, academic study of the field is still continuing to grow and gain momentum. N. Katherine Hayles, Christopher Funkhouser and Loss Pequeño Glazier are among the most prolific scholars of digital literature, and Emanuela Patti offers what is, at present, a rare Italian perspective on online writing.² Leonardo Flores proposes a definition of digital poetry in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media*, asserting 'Digital poetry is a poetic practice made possible by digital media and technologies. [...] [d]igital poetry isn't simply poetry written on a computer and published in print or on the web.'³ In line with this conception, the majority of academic writing on online poetry focuses on works which are essentially digitally native, requiring programming or software for their creation. There are fewer works on the forms of interaction and dissemination of literature which are unique to the internet, although Ruth Page, Bronwen Thomas and Scott Rettberg have all written extensively on this topic, though not – at present – with regards to poetry. This chapter takes the unprecedented step of discussing the phenomenon of Holocaust poems online and analysing a number of these works, addressing the impact of the medium of the internet on dissemination and reader interaction. The works discussed here do not necessarily adhere to Flores' definition of digital poetry since they are not fundamentally shaped by computer technology, though they do take advantage of the multimedia potential of the internet, as will be discussed below. For this reason, I have chosen to term these works 'online poems', rather than 'digital poems'. Their online presence is essential to their reception, and fundamental to the dissemination of their Holocaust message.

² Patti's monograph, *The Digital Turn in Italian Culture* is forthcoming, see also 'Letteratura oltre i confini del libro. Storie e narrazioni attraverso i media', in *Lingua e cultura italiana nei mass media*, ed. by Marco Gargiulo (Rome: Aracne, 2014), pp. 31-55.

³ Leonardo Flores, 'Digital Poetry', in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media*, ed. by Marie-Laure Ryan, Lori Emerson and Benjamin J. Robertson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp. 155-61 (p. 155).

4.2 The democratization of art

The internet provides an invaluable space for aspiring writers to share their own writing and access the work of others. There are no formal barriers to publication, no editorial scrutiny, no cost involved: the internet 'lets poets publish without worrying about commercial pressures.'⁴ All that is required is an internet connection. Its growing impact resonates throughout the literary world: '[l]iterary publishing on the web represents a new, yet slightly controversial, era of creative expression and enhanced democratization of literary culture, and its impact on writers, readers, publishers, and libraries has been significant.'⁵ References to the democratization of literary culture return time and again in scholarly discussion of the internet's legacy. Indeed, online it appears that Walter Benjamin's assertion, 'the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character'⁶ has never been more true.

In *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins grapples with the novel dynamics of new media, writing: '[r]ather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands.'⁷ While we might still be getting to grips with the new types of interaction between online readers and writers – a challenging task since interactive possibilities evolve as sites get upgraded and optimised – it is clear that the internet offers an interactive platform for an unprecedentedly vast body of readers and writers.

Page and Thomas discuss the increasing accessibility of online writing:

Where once the ability to create online text would have entailed specialist knowledge of programming techniques, the advent of what are popularly known as Web 2.0 technologies in the late 1990s has enabled users with

⁴ Thomas Pack, 'Poetry Belongs on the Web', *Link-up*, 18:3 (May/June 2001), 22.

⁵ Rachel A. Fleming-May and Harriett Green, 'Digital Innovations in Poetry: Practices of Creative Writing Faculty in Online Literary Publishing', *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 67:4 (2016), 859-873 (p. 859).

⁶ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schcken Books, 1969), p. 232.

⁷ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, c2006), p. 3.

relatively low technical skills to upload and manipulate text with unprecedented ease.⁸

Now, armed with an internet connection, any computer-literate person is able to write, publish and share their work at the click of the button, and their potential readership is vast.

What makes the internet so powerful in the renaissance of poetry is the access, visibility and audiences available online. The internet provides an instantly accessible platform for poetry readers and writers of all ages, abilities and backgrounds:

There is something inherently democratizing -- perhaps even revolutionary -- about the technology. Not only has it enfranchised thousands of would-be writers who otherwise might never have taken up the craft, but it has also thrown together classes of people who hadn't had much direct contact before: students, scientists, senior citizens, computer geeks, grass-roots (and often blue-collar) bulletin-board enthusiasts and most recently the working press.⁹

The internet allows any aspiring poet to write for audiences they would never normally have reached with traditional print publication. Although the internet now offers access to poetry on an unprecedented level, the sheer quantity of literature published online makes it difficult to find and organise works, as Funkhouser writes:

The field of digital poetry exists in a non-commercial realm. One might attempt to evaluate scientifically [...] and rank practitioners based on the number of works they have created, or by how many performances or installations they have been invited to prepare or publish, but such equations would be problematic for many reasons. Many accomplished works have been produced, but only a few bring much public attention to the field.¹⁰

In traditional print publishing, the books which reach our bookshelves have already undergone multiple reviews and readings to attempt to ensure they hold a certain, marketable value, and this to some degree acts as a guarantee of quality, just as the translation of a work can be considered a judgment on the part of the translator and

⁸ Ruth Page and Bronwen Thomas, 'Introduction', in *New Narratives: Stories and Storytelling in the Digital Age*, ed. by Ruth Page and Bronwen Thomas (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), pp. 1-16 (p. 2).

⁹ Philip Elmer-Dewitt, 'Bards of the Internet', *Time*, 144:1 (1994), 66-67 (p. 66).

¹⁰ Funkhouser, *New Directions in Digital Poetry*, p. 21.

publisher on the quality of the original and the value of translating it for a wider audience (see section 3.5). On the internet, marketability is no longer a driving force, and the ease with which anyone can upload their writing has inevitably led to a proliferation of mass poetry of dubious quality.

An ongoing project, *The Electronic Literature Collection*,¹¹ which is currently formed of three volumes, is an attempt to establish a canon of online literature, imbuing certain works with the critical recognition we associate with print publications. The literature included in the *ELO* can largely be thought of as highly experimental. Indeed, Marie-Laure Ryan suggests:

A major trend of the works represented in these collections – a trend undoubtedly reinforced by the selective work of the editors – is not to tell stories, express emotions, create immersive worlds, or defend values, but to create interesting textual objects [...] To say that texts become objects means that what matters to the user (note that I do not employ the term reader) is much more the spectacle of language, or the algorithm that manipulates it, than the meaning of the words.¹²

Generally speaking, the works collected in the *ELO* represent an exploration of the experimental extremes of literary creation online, where form takes precedence over content. This, as well as the fact that the collection is dominated by works in English and, to date, features no work in Italian, render it an unsatisfactory repository for works such as those analysed in this thesis, where the communicated Holocaust message is of significance.

The drive to anthologise online works and arrange these anthologies in volumes such as the *ELO* demonstrates a desire to organise internet literature according to pre-existing print traditions. The move to fit online writing into more mainstream models is, paradoxically, evidence of its continued controversial nature. Filippo Milani discusses the issues associated with internet self-publication, with particular regard

¹¹ <http://collection.eliterature.org/> [accessed 28 February 2017].

¹² Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Digital Narrative: Negotiating a Path between Experimental Writing and Popular Culture', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 13:3 (2016), 331-352 (p. 333).

to poetry, in his article 'Interferenze informatiche nella poesia italiana contemporanea':

L'accoglienza del nuovo *medium* della rete globale [...] non è stata univoca, oscillando tra la speranza che Internet fosse la salvezza per un genere molto praticato ma poco letto, quindi disastroso dal punto di vista editoriale, e il timore per una rapida degenerazione della qualità della produzione poetica, a causa della grande disponibilità concessa agli aspiranti poeti di pubblicare *on-line* i propri testi immediatamente visibili ad un vasto pubblico. Distanza di qualche anno entrambe le posizioni sembrano ancora valide, poiché l'interazione tra poesia e Rete multimediale - in particolare nel panorama poetico italiano - non ha trovato un proprio equilibrio, offrendo sì maggiore possibilità di circolazione dei testi ma anche una incontrollata proliferazione della poesia amatoriale.¹³

Milani acknowledges the ambivalent reaction to internet writing: caught between a celebration of the poetry revival which the internet has facilitated, and a lamentation of the perceived deterioration of poetic quality which can be found online as a result. Milani suggests that, in Italy, a balance between the two has not yet been found. This chapter suggests that sites such as Scrivere offer the potential for an online community in which access and quality are not mutually exclusive.

On the surface it seems that works published online lack the stamp of approval, the editorial judgment and approbation of the print world, but this is not necessarily the case. While Milani is correct in his assertion that the internet allows for anyone to publish poetry, with no guarantee of quality, the same cannot be said for sites such as Scrivere. These host websites, like print publishers, attract potential writers by offering both a large platform and some degree of quality guarantee. Online the editorial scrutiny does not only come from in-house professionals, but from the feedback of the active community of readers, writers and critics who view a given work. These communities, though intangible, can encompass vast number of members, and it is this feature which forms the basis of Milani's excitement and concern. While Milani fears that banality and amateurism will pervade, what actually emerges on sites such as Scrivere is an adapted version of the peer review format, in

¹³ Filippo Milani, 'Interferenze informatiche nella poesia italiana contemporanea', *Between*, 4:8 (2014), 1-29 (p. 1), <http://ojs.unica.it/index.php/between/article/view/1318/1119> [accessed 12 January 2017].

which works are assessed and validated by the community of poetry readers online, and from which certain poets emerge as more or less successful. Comments and the number of times a poem has been read offer an indication of a poem's reception – just as these are indicators of success in print publishing. In many cases, the online model offers a more stringent approval system, since there are many more potential readers casting public judgement on a given poem. The online renaissance has not only produced new poets and new poetry readers, it also provides readers with the tools to directly respond to and publicly critique a poem. Poetry online is effectively open for discussion: a dialogue. Arguably what has been achieved is the closest thing to Benjamin's prescient conception of the democratization of art: online there are global communities of reader/writers which self-moderate and self-evaluate, making it easier for a visiting reader to discern which works are most valued by readers.

4.3 Scrivere

In setting out to write a chapter on online poetry, it quickly became apparent that it would be necessary to narrow down the field of study from the unimaginably vast internet, and vague notions of 'online communities', to a specific, workable example. The website www.scrivere.info has been mentioned at several points over the preceding pages and this section will offer a detailed description of what the site offers to reader and writers of poetry in the twenty-first century.

6'437 visitatori in 24 ore
287 visitatori online adesso

PAGINE DI POESIA **Scrivere** SPAZIO ALLE EMOZIONI

"Solo dei poeti, ormai, solo della gente che lascia il cuore volare, che lascia la propria fantasia senza la pesantezza del quotidiano, è capace di pensare diversamente, ed è questo di cui oggi avremmo bisogno." (Tiziano Terzani)

Poesie Racconti Pubblicare Leggere poesie Leggere racconti Entra nel sito Iscriviti al sito Community Gli autori Altri siti

Menu del sito

Autore del mese: Rosanna Peruzzi

San Valentino

Le 55 poesie pubblicate nello speciale "San Valentino"

MI avvoio la tua voce Amore

Dolce poesia è la tua voce
incantesimo della notte
veste ignuda corpo di magia,
luce di stelle scintille di gioia
scandole dolcissime l'anima.
Si ferma il tempo!
insaziabile piacer d'amore
inestricabile nodo
profondo bacio di passione
mi porta LEGGI...

Maria Assunta Maglio 14/02/2017 10:21 [10] [7]

Vivimi amore Amore

Sogna
dentro i miei occhi e toccami l'anima
con lo sguardo di chi
vive l'amore, dentro i confini del cielo.
Prendimi ancora, amore,
in questo mare colorato di gioia
dove cancella il vento
ogni orma bagnata dal destino.
Attraversami il cuore... LEGGI...

Melina Licata 14/02/2017 07:44 [74] [41]

L'aura Amore

Sei tutto ciò che penso
e vivo-inciso del tuo nome.
Baci d'alba le tempie
sopario ove recita il senso
d'ambita pace -e sembra... LEGGI...

carla vercelli 13/02/2017 18:51 [1] [50] [36]

Donna con amante Amore

E se,
quando migliaia di occhi
ti trapanano l'anima,
senti un brusio,
quella son io;
che chiedo aiuto.
E se
la folla è oceanica,
ma non vedi nessuno,
raggiungimi al fiume;
e domani le lacrime
s'asciugheranno al sole.
E... LEGGI...

Le parole nelle poesie

Amore
Anima Bambino Cielo
Coraggio Corpo Cuore
Delusione Desiderio
Destino Donna Emozione
Felicità Gioia Giorno
Libertà Luce Luna Madre
Malinconia Mano Mare
Memoria Morte Musica
Natura Notte Notte
Nuovo Occhio Pace Paura
Piangere Profumo Rabbia
Ricordo Sentimento
Serenità Sogno Sole
Solitudine Speranza
Stelle Tempo Terra
Tristezza Uomo Vento
Vita

Figure 4.1 Screenshot of Scrivere.info homepage¹⁴

Scrivere acts as a host site, a forum for the dissemination, reading and discussion of poems and stories online. This site has been selected as it is a widely-used Italian language poetry website, which is free to use. As can be seen in the figures in the top left-hand side of the screenshot above, the site is highly active, with 6,437 visitors in 24 hours and 287 visitors online when visited on 14th February 2017. The site hosts over 300,000 poems and has 7,357 active authors¹⁵ and as such it offers a fairly comprehensive view of contemporary Italian poetry.

As the menu bar along the top of the webpage, and down the left-hand side indicate, the visitor has the option to read poems, stories, join the website and find out more about the authors, among other options. Scrivere showcases a different poet each month, with 'Poet of the month' being highlighted at the top of the page, along with a selection of the newest poems to the site which, on this particular visit, had a Valentine's Day theme. The 'Poet of the month' feature, as well as Scrivere's sister site, www.rimescelte.com (where the editors publish selected poems from Scrivere at their discretion) are both ways in which the reader can judge poet's or a poem's reception.

It is free to join Scrivere, and users must simply register with a username, an email address, password, date of birth and city of residence. Users must also accept the site's terms and conditions before an account can be created.

¹⁴ Screenshot taken on 14th February 2017 at 10.08am.

¹⁵ Figures correct according to scrivere.info on 14th February 2017, at 4.09pm.

Menu del sito

- Poesie
- Racconti
- Leggere poesie
- Leggere racconti
- Entra nel sito
- Iscriviti al sito
- Community
- Gli autori
- Libri del sito
- Altri siti

Le #parole nelle poesie

- Amicizia
- Amore
- Anima
- Bambino
- Cielo
- Coraggio
- Corpo
- Cuore
- Desiderio
- Destino
- Donna
- Emozione
- Felicità
- Giola
- Giorno
- Libertà
- Luce
- Luna
- Madre
- Malinconia
- Mano
- Mare
- Memoria
- Morte
- Musica
- Natura
- Nostalgia
- Notte
- Nuvola
- Occhio
- Pace
- Pausa
- Piangere
- Profumo
- Rabbia
- Ricordo
- Sentimento
- Serenità
- Sogno
- Sole
- Solitudine
- Speranza
- Stelle
- Tempo
- Terra
- Tristezza
- Uomo
- Vento
- Vita

Registri per inserire le tue poesie!

Il tuo **nome pubblico**: [?] Solo caratteri alfanumerici

Poiché l'art. 8 della Legge 633/41 dice che per la protezione del diritto d'autore "Valgono come nome lo pseudonimo, il nome d'arte, la sigla o il segno convenzionale, che siano **notoriamente conosciuti** come equivalenti al nome vero.", è consigliabile non utilizzare nickname o pseudonimi come nome pubblico, a meno che non sia un nick con cui tu sia notoriamente conosciuto, in modo inequivocabile, su tutta Internet, in tutto il mondo. Se tieni al diritto d'autore sulle tue poesie, usa il tuo nome e cognome.

Il tuo **indirizzo e-mail**: Attenzione: spesso gli indirizzi del gruppo Microfot (@hotmail, @libero, @live, @alice e @outlook) NON ricevono le nostre mail. [?]

(Inserisci un indirizzo di posta che consulti di frequente, in quanto ti verranno inviati avvisi riguardanti le tue poesie)

Vuoi mostrare il tuo **indirizzo e-mail**? [?] NO

Nome utente (4-12 caratteri) per l'accesso:

Password (4-12 caratteri) per l'accesso: (Una sola parola, senza spazio, te ne suggeriamo una)

Data di nascita: Anno(YYYY)-Mese(MM)-Giorno(DD)

Luogo di residenza:

Sesso:

Regolamento del sito.
Devi leggerlo ed acconsentire per poter terminare la registrazione:

Attenzione: la registrazione non dà diritto di scrivere commenti o nel forum, questo sarà concesso solo dopo cinque poesie convalidate dalla redazione.

Please note: the registration does not entitle you to write comments or into the forum, this will be granted only after five poems validated by the editorial staff.

Accordo/regolamento del sito. [?]
ACCORDO PER LA PUBBLICAZIONE SUL SITO OPERA COLLETTIVA "SCRIVERE"
NORME GENERALI
La registrazione di un utente al sito "Scrivere" (scrivere.info) è gratuita. E' consentita la registrazione di un solo account per ciascuna singola persona.
La pubblicazione dell'indirizzo di e-mail è soggetta all'approvazione dell'utente. L'utente non deve fornire identità o indirizzo di e-mail di altri individui o comunque notizie personali o testi di cui sia venuto a conoscenza nella sua qualità di iscritto al sito.
Il sito "Scrivere" è un'opera collettiva che ospita opere di poesia di una molteplicità di autori, scelte e coordinate con il fine letterario di rappresentare l'immagine della letteratura poetica italiana contemporanea. Le opere proposte per la pubblicazione devono essere originali, anche se non inedite. La pubblicazione delle opere è soggetta a:
☐ **Accetto** l'accordo/regolamento del sito, che dichiaro di aver letto nella sua totalità.

Visitatori in 24 ore: **6'602**
299 persone sono online

Figure 4.2 Registration page of Scrivere.info¹⁶

In the terms and conditions, the following description is offered of the website:

[i]l sito "Scrivere" è un'opera collettiva che ospita opere di poesia di una molteplicità di autori, scelte e coordinate con il fine letterario di rappresentare l'immagine della letteratura poetica italiana contemporanea.

The site's aim, therefore, is to present an up-to-date collection of contemporary Italian poetry. In order to be published on the site, works 'devono essere originali, anche se non inedite.' There is a degree of editorial scrutiny, and the terms state that '[l]a pubblicazione delle opere è soggetta all'approvazione di un redattore.' Elsewhere, in the frequently asked questions page, it is stated that this editorial control 'non si tratta di un "esame" di qualità, ma di verificare la presenza di alcuni criteri per pubblicare nel sito.' These criteria constitute a mixture of legal, stylistic and formal requirements. As is stated on the website, poems must be approved by an editor before being published, however this – as is outlined above – does not amount to an assessment of the poem's quality in traditional print-based terms. While online poems may not be sent for scholarly peer review before publication, they are subject to an ongoing assessment in the form of comments.

Scrivere emphasises the usefulness and importance of comments, stating:

¹⁶ Screenshot taken on 14th February 2017 at 2.18pm.

Il commento è uno strumento di crescita qualitativa degli autori e del sito, di scambio di esperienze e competenze, quindi se hai un commento positivo o negativo sulla poesia da scambiare con gli altri lettori, un modo di interpretare la poesia che vuoi condividere, una osservazione od un suggerimento per la lettura o la scrittura della poesia, un suggerimento che possa essere utile per la sua comprensione, il commento è lo strumento giusto per esprimerlo.

As this assertion makes clear, comments are perceived as being a vital facet of this online poetry community. In order to ensure a certain quality control of the comments, users are only allowed to post comments once they themselves have had five poems approved by the editors. In theory, this means that only those with some rudimentary understanding of successful poetry are able to pass judgment on others. What is clear, therefore, is that Scrivere is keen to ensure a certain degree of selectivity, and an aspiration to host an active and engaged poetry community, which provides constructive feedback with a view to artistic development and growth amongst users.

The commenting feature is one of the primary distinguishing features of online poetry, as opposed to print poetry. Comments function as a litmus test for a poem's reception, allowing us to measure the vocal reading public's reaction to a given poem. Scholars have, to date, mainly focussed on the interactive nature of comments on blogs, exploring the collaborative nature of the dynamic between writer and reader. Ruth Page writes 'the commenting facility on blogs point to the blurred roles of production and reception that are entailed in blogging'.¹⁷ On fanfiction, Bronwen Thomas states: '[a]uthors, however much they may be revered, are conceived of as participants in an ongoing conversation, their creativity and handling of narrative technique seen as something to engage with rather than be admired from afar.'¹⁸ While Page and Thomas are discussing specific online communities, their comments apply – albeit to a lesser extent – to online poetry sites such as Scrivere. While we cannot argue for true interactivity on Scrivere, since readers are not able to directly alter or affect the poem's content (though their comments may hypothetically cause

¹⁷ Ruth Page, 'Blogs', in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media*, ed. by Ryan, Emerson and Robertson, pp. 42-5 (p. 43).

¹⁸ Bronwen Thomas, "'Update Soon!': Harry Potter Fanfiction and Narrative as a Participatory Process", in *New Narratives*, ed. by Page and Thomas, pp. 205-219 (p. 217).

the author to edit or even delete their work), readers' comments *do* potentially alter or shape other readers' appraisal of the poem, since they are publicly presented as an addendum to the poem. As such they become, in some way, a part of the online poem experience, interacting indirectly with the author's own words, and offering an invaluable insight into the reception of Holocaust poems online.

4.4 Presenting, preserving and reading online texts

Online content is constantly shifting and changing. Unlike the pages of a printed book the internet does not remain static. This renders it challenging to satisfactorily present and preserve online texts and raises issues when it comes to scholarly writing on online literature. At present there is no reliable way to comprehensively capture the content of a webpage in its entirety, encompassing sound, movies and other extra-textual elements. Funkhouser alludes to his own encounters with such difficulties in his academic research:

Eventual hardware, software and network modifications (e.g. 'upgrades' that squelch capabilities of previous versions of programs) make inevitable the extinction of certain, if not entire swaths of, works. Unfortunately such departures can happen quickly and unexpectedly.¹⁹

How, then, to ensure that the online content discussed in a piece of academic writing such as this is accessible and available to be viewed in the same form for readers in weeks, months and years to come? As Bertrand Gervais asks, '[h]ow do we handle what cannot be held, what literally slips through our fingers?'²⁰ The best solution at present is to take screenshots of the web pages accessed and, where helpful, include these in the body of the text. This removes the necessity for readers to access the pages online and ensures that all readers are viewing the same version of the page. Screenshots have the disadvantage, however, of reducing a potentially fluid and evolving work to a single, frozen moment. A screenshot locks a work and inhibits its potential to grow and develop. When we offer a screenshot of a poem for analysis we are analysing only one of its infinite possible versions. The same is also true for

¹⁹ Funkhouser, *New Directions in Digital Poetry*, p. 8.

²⁰ Bertrand Gervais, 'Is There a Text on This Screen? Reading in an Era of Hypertextuality', in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, ed. by Siemens and Schreibman, pp. 183-202 (p. 192).

the analysis of a poem in a book: the poem could be reprinted with modifications, however the difference is that there would remain a tangible, discoverable copy of the previous version. Online, a poem can be edited by the author and the new version can entirely replace the older form, leaving no trace whatsoever – except in any extant screenshots. It is for this reason that I have carefully documented the key pages I’ve accessed by taking screenshots. While this methodology is only partially successful in preserving online works, since it cannot capture various extra-textual elements such as music and video, at present it appears the most satisfactory means of maintaining a surviving copy of a specific poem.

While screenshots are unable to capture music, video and other extra-textual elements, it remains imperative to include any such features in the analysis of an online poem, since they are a significant part of what sets online poetry apart from print-based poetry. Of course, as David Golumbia writes:

Especially with regard to visual media, it has never actually been the case that printed words and other forms of media occur in complete isolation from each other; from the earliest forms of illuminated and illustrated texts, to the often highly decorative forms of hieroglyphic and calligraphic writing practiced around the world, word and image have often coexisted, to greater and lesser degrees.²¹

What distinguishes multimedia literature online from print-based formats is both the dynamic possibilities available online (videos, GIFs, audio etc.), lack of commercial constraints (there is no expense necessarily associated with including images and other multimedia components alongside a text), and placement (there is greater freedom in terms of space online – writers are not restrained to the dimensions of a fixed page). While the multimedia possibilities of the internet are not entirely novel, the extent to which such elements can be included, and the author’s freedom to shape their works on many levels, certainly is. Lev Manovich succinctly states:

²¹ David Golumbia, ‘Characteristics of Digital Media’, in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media*, ed. by Ryan, Emerson and Robertson, pp. 54-9 (p. 55).

[o]n the level of aesthetics, the web has established the *multimedia* document (i.e., something which combines and mixes the different media of text, photography, video, graphics, and sound) as a new communication standard.²²

The internet therefore offers writers a vast range of possibilities, as Funkhouser writes: 'in this new poetic paradigm, words do not surrender their power but instead share it with that of other expressive elements, and reading now happens on multiple registers.'²³ Complementary elements add to, rather than detract from, the words on the screen. Music and images further extend the writer's expressive repertoire and offer an immersive audiovisual experience for the reader. The fact that online poetry is able to operate on multiple levels is particularly pertinent for online poetry about Auschwitz, which, as outlined above and previously in this thesis, must always strive to convey its message as fully and successfully as possible.

There remains, however, a degree of skepticism in the academic community as to whether online poems are able to stand up to close scrutiny and in-depth analysis. Many critics argue they do not, and that our very manner of reading online work inhibits close analysis, indeed Bertrand Gervais raises some very important and relevant questions:

Can we read a text on a linked screen the same way we read a text printed on paper? Can we engage in the same activities and with the same ease? More often than not [...] we engage in a rapid form of reading, where the impetus is more on progression than comprehension, more on rapidity than density. Can we read a literary text on a screen? Can we analyze it, interpret it, and evaluate its format and esthetic aspects?²⁴

Gervais argues that our reading habits online, where we scan, scroll and surf, mean that we fail to invest the same attention in the literature we encounter on the internet as we do with printed literature. Gervais cautions against the internet's

²² Lev Manovich, 'Postmedia Aesthetics', in *Transmedia Frictions: The Digital, the Arts, and the Humanities*, ed. by Marsha Kinder and Tara McPherson (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 34-44 (p. 36).

²³ Funkhouser, *New Directions in Digital Poetry*, p. 249.

²⁴ Gervais, 'Is There a Text on This Screen?', in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies* ed. by Siemens and Schreibman, p. 192.

potential to facilitate a degeneration of reading standards, and the destruction of boundaries between the literary and the quotidian:

The internet pushes further the reading practices typical of popular culture, where magazines and newspapers are quickly read and then disposed of. Generic markers play an important role in defining initial reading strategies and reader involvement. One does not approach a literary texts the same way as a news item. With the linked computer, these generic markers lose their relevance. Books and magazines, literary texts, and press releases share the same space, the window of a browser, and they are subject to the same initial reading strategies.²⁵

While Gervais appears disparaging of what he perceives as the hyperconsumption of modern society, encouraged by our online browsing habits, it is important to look closely at what he is lamenting. He fears that lumping together news, gossip and literature online essentially equates them in the online reader's mind, affecting the way a reader approaches such material. Yet it is only the reader's '*initial* reading strategy' (my emphasis) which is affected by accessing works online. An argument can be made that the initial accessing and reading of literature online is conditioned by our online habits of browsing and skimming, but, as is true of all formats, successful poetry will demand multiple, more engaged readings. In any case, our reading habits, both online and offline, are not the same as engagement with a text. Engagement, be it with a poem in a printed book or a poem on the internet, necessitates an entirely different way of reading, and successful online poetry about Auschwitz must stand up to the scrutiny of close and multiple readings.

The four poems which will be analysed in this chapter, all written by Giorgia Spurio, *do* stand up to the scrutiny of close analysis, as shall be demonstrated below, and offer successful examples of contemporary online poetry about Auschwitz. The poems selected all appear in Spurio's collection '*Memoria e Shoah, preghiere in versi*', which the poet describes as containing '*Poesie per ricordare*'. The *raccolta* groups together ten poems, of which the four selected are directly linked to the Holocaust by Spurio in the author's comments. Three of the poems (as their dates of composition attest) were written to mark Holocaust Memorial Day and are dedicated


²⁵ Gervais, 'Is There a Text on This Screen?', in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, ed. by Siemens and Schreibman, p. 191.

as such. This chapter will analyse the four poems in the order in which Spurio presents them in her collection: beginning with 'Il pianto dell'Acheronte' (29/01/2011), 'Il ventre del pensiero' (27/01/2010), 'Il gas dietro le sbarre' (22/06/2010) and, finally, 'Dentro la vernice del giacchio' (27/01/2016). Screenshots will be presented of each of the poems, as well as links to the poems and to accompanying music and/or videos.²⁶ Extratextual elements, including author's comments and feedback from other readers and writers on Scrivere, as well as statistics for each poem, such as number of views, will be discussed, since they all, whether consciously or unconsciously, shape our reception and comprehension of the online poems.


4.5 Online poetry about the Holocaust

Scrivere is a prime example of the internet's ability to forge a community of thousands of Italian poetry enthusiasts. A number of these online writers, in line with other types of poets discussed previously in this thesis, demonstrate a desire to explore the events of the Holocaust in their writing. A quick search of the key terms 'Shoah' and 'Auschwitz' reveal a number of poems composed by the online community on Scrivere:


²⁶ Such links may become obsolete, as discussed above, but they are present and correct at the time of writing.




[Shoah](#)
 Le poesie della raccolta **Shoah** di Giorgia Spurio. ... **Shoah** di Giorgia Spurio
 Poesie per non dimenticare247073. Le 6 poesie pubblicate nella raccolta ...
www.scrivere.info/raccolta.php?raccolta=1163




[Memoria e Shoah](#)
 Le poesie della raccolta Memoria e **Shoah** di Giorgia Spurio.
www.scrivere.info/raccolta.php?raccolta=1447



[Memoria e Shoah - Raccolta delle poesie di Giorgia Spurio](#)
 Il pianoforte degli infermi. Parte il pensiero, frammenti di lacrime estranee a
 questa casa che ingoia anime senza perché, che ingoia bolle che l'ossigeno
 stringe ...
giorgiaspurio.scrivere.info/index.php?raccolta...Shoah




[Shoah - Poesia di Salvatore Ambrosino \(Sociale\)](#)
 Il sol pensier / m'angoscia // ricordare / l'infame gesto // che mente umana osò //
 L' odore di carni arse // impregnate / sulle coscienze / di chi ignobile accese il ...
salvatoreambrosino.scrivere.info/index.php?...t=Shoah




[Shoah](#)
 Le poesie di Giorgia Spurio pubblicate sul sito 'Scrivere.info', la sua biografia, le
 poesie più recenti e le sue preferite.
giorgiaspurio.scrivere.info/index.php?raccolta...t=Shoah



[Umana disumanità \(shoah\) di Pina Chirulli \(Cronaca\)](#)
 28 gen 2016 ... Umana disumanità (**shoah**), Dai campi di sterminio sale l'urlo dei
 deportati, annichiliti nel nulla di giorni sempre uguali. Smagriti ed impauriti
www.scrivere.info/poesia.php?poesia=405091



[INNO ALLA SHOAH Lacrime oltre la memoria di CARMINE DE](#)
 21 gen 2015 ... INNO ALLA **SHOAH** Lacrime oltre la memoria, Commemorar di
 canto e di vittoria, la dolorosa storia del passato mai dimenticato. Figli deportati,
www.scrivere.info/poesia.php?poesia=374358



[Poesie sulla cronaca](#)
 (Umana disumanità (**shoah**) di Pina Chirulli). Per tutti i bambini morti nei nostri
 mari leggi ... (Figlio emigrante di Pina Chirulli) Ogni 27 Gennaio ricorre il giorno

Figure 4.3 Key term search for 'Shoah'²⁷

²⁷ Screenshot taken on 14th February 2017 at 3.18pm.

[Il Ricordo di Auschwitz - Poesia di Federico Calderone \(Riflessioni\)](#)

luogo a dir poco surreale, emblema della crudeltà e del male. Criminali dall'odio accecati, che dalla Giustizia Divina verranno giudicati. Nel ricordo di **Auschwitz**
federicocalderone.scrivere.info/index.php?poesia=414301

[Auschwitz - Poesia di Diana Blancato \(Riflessioni\)](#)

Evoca crimini efferati / il male assoluto, / il genocidio più assurdo, / centinaia di uomini / passarono per i camini, / nero fumo che / annebbiò le menti / offuscò le ...
www.scrivere.info/poesia.php?poesia=404949



[La neve di Auschwitz di andrea ristori \(Impressioni\)](#)

27 gen 2017 ... l'algido e muto luore antico dell'eterno ritorno del ricordo che quel soffio di morte non spazza. La neve di **Auschwitz** sempre nuova nel cuore.
www.scrivere.info/poesia.php?poesia...t...Auschwitz

[Auschwitz "CAMPO di concentramento" - Poesia di Maria Assunta ...](#)

Immane genocidio / perpetrato da mente / nazista, / Ebrei "Indesiderabili"! / Persecuzione, maltrattamenti, / come bestie... / dentro filo spinato / a gettare.
www.scrivere.info/poesia.php?...t=AuschwitzCAMPO...



[Auschwitz di karen \(Morte\)](#)

3 feb 2017 ... **Auschwitz**. Morte. Ferro, legno baracche dove la speranza di un'aurora di sole si spegneva sull'erba bagnata di freddo. Selvaggi muri di pietra
www.scrivere.info/poesia.php?poesia=434302



[Lacrime del passato \(Auschwitz\) - Poesia di Michele Aliberti ...](#)

Lacrime e cemento / reggono mura di lamenti / e sogni persi nel tormento, / di uomini, donne / e bimbi innocenti. // Prigionieri senza tempo / dell'ingiusta pena ...
www.scrivere.info/poesia.php?poesia=84920



[Auschwitz per non dimenticare - Racconto di Mirella Santoniccolo](#)

26 gen 2011 ... Su quel treno, accalcati come bestie al macello, viaggiavano per una destinazione ignota. "Dove ci staranno portando?" si chiedeva Giuseppe ...
www.scrivere.info/racconti/racconto.php?racconto=416

[Auschwitz di Felice Serino \(Sociale\)](#)

3 feb 2015 ... La composizione della luce di Felice Serino (45 poesie) (2014). Nell'infinito di noi di Felice Serino (45 poesie) (2015). **Auschwitz**. Sociale ...
www.scrivere.info/poesia.php?poesia=375601

Figure 4.4 Key term search for 'Auschwitz'²⁸

These screenshots show only the initial listings in each search, but the results extended to several pages, a clear indication that writers on Scrivere demonstrate the same commitment to commemorate and engage with the Holocaust in their writing as the other groups of writers discussed previously in this thesis. Literature continues to offer an effective medium for social commentary and commemoration of past atrocities. The online writers of the twenty-first century are responding to the

²⁸ Screenshot taken on 14th February 2017 at 3.19pm.

same imperative as Quasimodo, Guccini and Celan, and using their poetry to remember and challenge complacency.

In Chapter 2 I wrote of Quasimodo and Guccini '[t]he novelty of the two artists' work is not simply the fact that it was written, but that it was guaranteed a reception' (see section 2.2). This guaranteed audience was due to these artists' prominence in their respective fields of lyrical poetry and the *canzone d'autore*. The online poets of today are similarly guaranteed a reception, indeed a potential reception of thousands of international readers. The readership for online poets is granted without the same demands of pre-established public platform, skill and esteem, and, as a result, the literature we find online is of varying degrees of quality.

Marie-Laure Ryan employs a helpful metaphor in her discussions of literature, picturing a world map and separating it into the Tropics (popular culture), the North Pole (experimental, avant-garde literature) and the much sought-after Temperate Zone. The writers of the Temperate Zone are, she writes, 'officially recognized as 'serious literary authors', but they can be read for pleasure, without excessive mental exertion.'²⁹ She asserts that, to date, online literature 'has been largely restricted to the Tropics and to the North Pole.'³⁰ If the North Pole is where works such as those anthologised in the *Electronic Literature Collection* may be found, sites such as Scrivere are home to authors from both the Tropics and the Temperate Zone.

To continue with Ryan's metaphor, it is essential for successful Holocaust literature that the writer occupy the Temperate Zone. The North Pole writers' work is too often impenetrable, with the message being lost or compromised by form; while in the Tropics the writing is too basic, clichéd or contrived to convey a meaningful message. In the Temperate Zone, in the context of online Holocaust poetry, the poem commands an *impegno*, it inspires and incites the reader to reflect on the horrors of Auschwitz, its message must resonate beyond the computer screen.

²⁹ Ryan, 'Digital Narrative', pp. 331-2.

³⁰ Ryan, 'Digital Narrative', p. 332.

Holocaust poetry online, just like its print-based equivalent, must meet several criteria in order to be located in the Temperate Zone. Unlike generic, universal themes, such as death, love and friendship, Holocaust representation entails greater moral and ethical engagement from the internet poet. The criteria used in previous chapters apply equally to the online writer: language should demonstrate careful consideration, the subject matter should not be exploited simply to shock or disturb, but should cause the reader to question, to reflect and to engage with the events of the Second World War. Cary Nelson offers a list of questions Holocaust poets should ask themselves, and the following are pertinent when weighing the success of an online poem about Auschwitz:

[has the poem] succumbed to a sentimentality that diminishes this exceptional subject? [...] Does every line succeed, for a Holocaust poem cannot readily suffer a failed passage? [...] Is the poem really anything more than a Holocaust cliché? [...] Is the poem sufficiently new and surprising to shatter any complacency we bring to it?³¹

What Nelson's terms 'a Holocaust cliché' lies at the crux of the issue of deciding what constitutes successful poetry about Auschwitz. Jay Ladin discusses this issue, which is both depicted as inevitable, and to be avoided at all costs:

the historical and imaginative writings that have kept the Holocaust alive as a defining historical event have had an unintended side effect. The more the Holocaust is represented in language, the more conventionalized and clichéd—"stylized," as Primo Levi put it—the language of Holocaust representation becomes.

Ladin continues:

The vitality of the connection between past and present, subjectivity and history, is always tenuous. Stylized language automates this connection, implying that the meaning of the past is a given, that both the historical facts of the Holocaust and our subjective responses to it are embodied in pre-existing images and phrases rather than needing to be re-created through will and imagination.³²

³¹ Cary Nelson, 'Teaching and Editing at World's End: Collective Trauma and Individual Witness in American Holocaust Poetry', *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, 57:2 (2012), 221-244 (p. 230).

³² Jay Ladin, "'After the End of the World": Poetry and the Holocaust', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, XLV:2 (2006). <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0045.207> [accessed 3 May 2018].

The role of the successful writer of Holocaust poetry, Ladin suggests, is 'to keep the past painfully present and unaccounted for by the stylized boredom of well-oiled sentiments, endlessly iterated horrifying details, and moral clichés.'³³ Successful poems will therefore resist stylization and demonstrate the writer's effort to engage afresh with the Holocaust, in order to create a valuable and considered response to the Nazi genocide.

Since Holocaust poems discuss a specific historical event, and once published contribute to the vast array of representations which shape public understanding of Auschwitz, it is essential that online writers avoid misinformation. One of the potential dangers of online poetry about Auschwitz is the ease with which incorrect information, whether shared deliberately or unknowingly, can be spread on the internet. Such misinformation strengthens those who would seek to deny the Holocaust's existence, or throw doubt over the testimony of survivors. At a time where authentic eyewitnesses are growing rarer, it is imperative to ensure that scholarly attention and engagement is afforded only to those whose work is based on a solid and informed understanding of the Holocaust. A platform must not be provided for those who seek to denigrate the suffering of the millions of individuals at the hands of the Nazis.

One writer in particular on Scrivere was felt to meet the criteria outline above, and demonstrates a keen commitment to find new ways to commemorate the Holocaust in her work. Giorgia Spurio, a prolific writer on Scrivere, has published poems both online and in print, and has received a number of prizes for her work (see the screenshot below).

³³ Ladin, "'After the End of the World'".

close textual analysis of Spurio's work, it is necessary to establish how online poetry can be presented and preserved.

4.6 'Il pianto dell'Acheronte' (29/01/2011)

Considerazione dell'autore

«1933- 1945»

Inserita il 12/01/2012

Giorgia Spurio

Il pianto dell'Acheronte

Sociale

Si copri il volto
arando con le dita la terra
e il seno era arido di latte.
Il mondo non camminava
né con la testa tra le mani
né danzando come le fanciulle dei fiumi.

E si spense d'improvviso
il vuoto del nulla
tra le costole degli arresi.
Mentre a pregare a un Dio
rimanevano gli arrestati,
innocenti santi condannati.

Non avevano corde per non respirare,
non avevano l'obbligo di urlare,
soffrire nel soffocato orrore
dove l'inverno non conosce fiore.

Non c'era che sabbia di neve calpestata,
non c'era che un "noi sussurrato" con paura
tra la pelle nuda e le ossa,
tra le lacrime gelate e il cielo che per dispetto
aveva persino le stelle.


Non hai mai pianto,
il freddo rapiva il respiro,
gli uomini vestiti da soldato
castravano gli occhi,
e la bocca non osava se non baci
nei ricordi e tra i balocchi dei piccini,
giocattoli decapitati per gioco
mentre il sangue si ferma davanti al mostro
della morte, delle tombe senza sepoltura,
dei cadaveri senza abiti,
delle vergini senza capelli,
e delle labbra ricucite dei bimbi.

Pregava il silenzio per avere in dono la sordità,
pregava il buio per avere il miracolo del divenire cecità.

E Cerbero dagli inferi della sua cuccia
mugolava il latrato segreto
tra le viscere di Acheronte,
dove Ade morì ad ogni anima,
frastornata da urla impresse
e annodate nella gola,
trasportata stanca e senza occhi
alla sua deriva.

Giorgia Spurio

29/01/2011 16:14 | 2 | 4567



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Nota dell'autore:

«gennaio, 1933- 1945
Shoah»

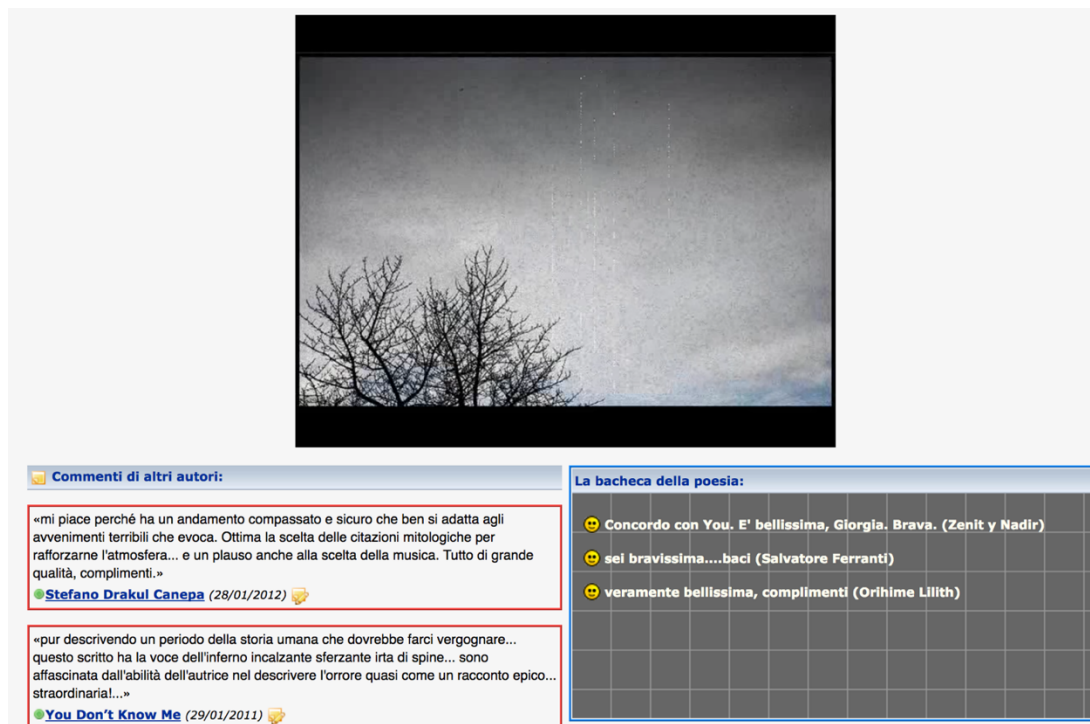


Figure 4.6 'Il pianto dell'Acheronte'³⁶

'Il pianto dell'Acheronte' was composed by Giorgia Spurio on 29th January 2011, two days after Holocaust Memorial Day, which is marked each year on 27th January. This poem, which has received over 4,500 views to date, is accompanied by two author comments. The first comment, which locates her subject matter within a specific historical period, is simply: '1933-1945' and is placed before the poem. The second:

<<gennaio, 1933-1945
 Shoah>>

appears after the poem's end. By referring to these specific dates in her author comments, Spurio is succinctly outlining the topic of the poem to the reader. January 1933 was when Hitler was appointed as German Chancellor and the first concentration camps were created, and January 1945 was when Auschwitz was liberated. 1933 therefore marks the beginning of persecution and murder of millions of Jews in Europe, and 1945 marks the end of the Second World War and freedom

³⁶<http://giorgiaspurio.scrivere.info/index.php?poesia=186642&t=Il+pianto+dell+Acheronte> [accessed 7 March 2017, at 3.25pm]. Link to the music video accompanying the poem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPL9-TWJsRM&feature=youtu.be>, Placebo, 'Holocaust'.

for the remaining prisoners in Nazi camps.³⁷ Spurio's poem, as she implies in the post-script, will deal with what occurred between these dates: the Shoah. Spurio's unequivocal inclusion of the word 'Shoah' in her author comment consciously ties the poem to the Holocaust, something which is never done directly in the poem itself.

A number of the poems studied in previous chapters, including Primo Levi's '25 febbraio 1944' (see section 1.4) and Salvatore Quasimodo's 'Auschwitz' (see section 2.6), have drawn parallels between Auschwitz and Hell, using terms which have tied the Holocaust to a specifically Italian, Dantean Hell. Spurio's poem refers instead to the Greek underworld, using characters from Greek mythology to convey the horror of the camps. She outlines this mythological dimension in the very title of the poem: 'Il pianto dell'Acheronte'. The Acheron was believed by the Ancient Greeks to be one of the rivers which led to the underworld, indeed 'Acheron derives from the word which means "affliction". It was the river of sadness'.³⁸ Spurio sets out her poem, therefore, as a cry of anguish, the cry of the Acheron as it ushers the departed to the afterlife. Other mythological names appear in the text, including Cerberus and Hades, both well-known figures in Greek mythology and essential and threatening representatives of the underworld. While the mythological origins of her poem's title might not be known to all of Spurio's readers, because her poem is online she can be confident that curious readers will be able to quickly arm themselves with the necessary background information using a search engine. Spurio's use of classical mythology recalls Quasimodo's references to Alpheus and Arethusa in 'Auschwitz' (see section 2.6), though while Quasimodo shows mythological figures of classical antiquity subsumed by the earthly horror of Auschwitz, Spurio adopts Greek myths to unequivocally equate the Holocaust with Hell.

'Il pianto dell'Acheronte' is formed of seven heterometric, endstopped stanzas and, at 43 lines is one of several longer poems written by Spurio about the Holocaust. The text is centred on the webpage, which creates an undulating visual effect since the lines vary in length. The poem is presented in a standard, black font which, given

³⁷ For a helpful timeline of the events of the Holocaust, please see <https://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/1933-1938> [accessed 14 March 2017].

³⁸ *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*, ed. by Felix Guirand (London: Hamlyn, 1984), pp. 164-5.

Spurio's adoption of other styles in different poems, is itself significant and focuses the reader's attention onto the words themselves rather than on the typesetting. The author's typographical decisions are another added dimension to online poetry where, unlike in traditional print-based poetry, the author is always able to choose and control precisely how their work is presented on the screen.

The poem is accompanied by a music video of Placebo's 'Holocaust'. The video Spurio has selected is not the song's official video, but one which is predominantly black and white and features static footage of a bare tree in front of grey clouds. The music is formed of slow piano with minimal drum accompaniment, and is a simple chord sequence in a minor key, played to a 4/4 rhythm. The vocals are slow and mournful, and the last word of the song is 'Holocaust', which is left to resonate in the reader/listener's head. The song begins playing automatically when the reader opens the poem in their browser and offers a low-key accompaniment to Spurio's words. The fact that Spurio has selected an English-speaking band's music to accompany her poem is notable: while we know that Spurio herself speaks English, since she has published English poetry on Scrivere, and indeed includes an English language poem in her collection 'Memoria e Shoah, preghiere in versi',³⁹ her intended reader for 'Il pianto dell'Acheronte' is Italian, and there is no guarantee that such a reader would understand the lyrics of Placebo's 'Holocaust'. With this in mind, we can assume that she selected this song for its general tone and sound, the heavy minor key and anguished vocals.

The first stanza begins by introducing an unnamed figure, who moves to hide themselves in a defensive action, covering their face. Spurio continues by describing the figure as raking the earth with their fingers. These two actions, hiding and playing with the mud, are rather childlike, however the third line belies any notions of infantile fun: 'e il seno era arido di latte'. Line three is significant for a number of reasons: referring to the figure's breasts being empty of milk offers a clear indication that the figure is female, it also suggests privation, malnutrition and emptiness. The

³⁹ Giorgia Spurio, 'Angels' fall/La caduta degli angeli'
<http://giorgiaspurio.scrivere.info/index.php?poesia=238734&t=Angels+fall+/+La+caduta+degli+angeli>
li [accessed 16 March 2017].

inference is that this is a mother who is no longer able to sustain her child's life. The reference to milk is also significant in the Holocaust context, since it calls to mind Celan's 'Todesfuge', discussed in 0. The first stanza continues, dominated by negative qualifiers such as 'non' and 'né' which will continue throughout the poem. The final three lines of the stanza reinforce the stasis of the solitary figure who fruitlessly rakes the earth – the whole world stands still.

The second stanza introduces other nameless figures, defined only as 'arresi' and 'arrestati'. Given the author comments which tie the poem to the Holocaust, we can infer that Spurio is depicting the prisoners interred in the Nazi camps. The author sets up the two groups, the 'arresi' and the 'arrestati', in contrast to one another. The former she describes using a mixture of metaphorical and physical language, describing their moment of extinction using first figurative language 'si spense d'improvviso/ il vuoto del nulla' (ll. 7-8) and then the jarringly corporeal 'tra le costole' (l. 9). Once again Spurio makes recourse to negative language, it is the 'emptiness of nothing' which is extinguished in the 'arresi', implying that at the time of death there was no semblance of life remaining, just the skeletal reality of the deceased. Though line nine is end-stopped, effectively separating the 'arresi' from the 'arrestati', the conjunction 'mentre' is used to draw parallels between the two groups. While the 'arresi' are annihilated, the 'arrestati' are left to pray. The last line of the stanza contains only three adjectives, linked without punctuation in order to conflate and equate the three terms 'innocenti santi condannati'. The terminal rhyme between 'arrestati' and 'condannati' links the two notions, suggesting that they equate to the same thing and all those arrested are automatically condemned. The shift from predominantly anapaestic feet to trochees and a perfect trochaic pentameter in 'innocenti santi condannati' further compounds the inevitability of the prisoners' fate, presenting their destiny as rhythmically inescapable.

Spurio's decision to describe the prisoners in the Nazi camps as 'innocenti santi' is not without its issues. Many prominent Holocaust scholars challenge the depiction of the victims as entirely innocent and pure, as well as the suggestion that the SS were

all entirely evil.⁴⁰ Primo Levi famously discussed these issues in his chapter 'La zona grigia' in *I sommersi e i salvati*, stating: 'non era semplice la rete dei rapporti umani all'interno dei Lager: non era riducibile ai due blocchi delle vittime e dei persecutori.'⁴¹ Spurio's use of the word 'santi' is also controversial and loaded, since it implies agency, martyrdom, and dying for a cause. This is the antithesis of the Nazi aim, which was to degrade and obliterate its victims.⁴²

The following stanza is formed of two rhyming couplets, one of only two rhyming stanzas in the poem. Lines 13-16 are dominated by the privative qualifier 'non', which occurs four times in four lines, including the anaphorical repetition of '[n]on avevano' in lines 13-14 which emphasises the prisoners' helplessness and lack of agency. Their fate is simply 'soffrire nel soffocato orrore/ dove l'inverno non conosce fiore.' (ll. 15-6). The assonance of 'soffrire' and 'soffocato' (my emphasis) aurally enact the harshness of the prisoners' suffering and the hardness of their environment, where life is unable to flourish in the winter cold. This harsh environment ties in with the barren tree depicted in the accompanying music video, a dismal image of death, and an allusion to the climate of northern Europe, where the camps were established.

Anaphora is employed again in lines 17-18 to highlight the empty nature of the landscape which is devoid of anything but trampled snow, and the whispered fear of the inmates. Lines 19 and 20 also begin with anaphora, and this is used to build a fuller picture of the suffering of the victims who are naked skin and bones and whose tears freeze in the cold. Spurio depicts the environment itself as deliberately spiting the prisoners in the enjambed lines 20 and 21: 'il cielo che per dispetto/ aveva persino le stelle'. Spurio suggests that the beauty of the night sky is at odds with the suffering of the prisoners, and can only appear as an insensitive insult to the cruelty they are

⁴⁰ For a discussion of saintliness and the camps, see Tzvetan Todorov, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps*, trans. by Arthur Denner and Abigail Pollack (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996).

⁴¹ Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, p. 25.

⁴² Levi vehemently rejects the 'sanctification' of Holocaust victims, writing: 'È ingenuo, assurdo e storicamente falso ritenere che un sistema infero, qual era il nazionalsocialismo, santifici le sue vittime: al contrario, esso le degrada, le assimila a sé, e ciò tanto più quanto più esse sono disponibili, bianche, prive di un'ossatura politica o morale.' *I sommersi e i salvati*, p. 27.

enduring. This dactylic final line forms a falling rhythm which creates a feeling of oppression: even nature has turned on the inmates.

At 12 lines the fifth stanza is the longest in the poem, and it introduces an interlocutor: 'Non hai mai pianto' (l. 22). This statement, which initially appears to be an admiring acknowledgment of strength and resilience, is followed by a series of qualifying explanations, 'il freddo rapiva il respiro,/ gli uomini vestiti da soldato/ castravano gli occhi' (ll. 23-5), and it becomes clear that the lack of tears is due instead to the extremes of environment and treatment which render it physically impossible to cry. This lack of release is an added cruelty, and yet another instance of privation in this poem. Spurio alludes next to the imagined previous life of the figure, and a vivid image is presented of 'tra i balocchi dei piccini,/ giocattoli decapitati per gioco', this achieves two striking effects: firstly it demonstrates the domesticity of the victim in their previous life, and also draws a parallel between the disfigured and abandoned toys and the prisoners themselves, whose own lives were taken at will and without consideration of their humanity. Spurio presents the arbitrary cruelty of the Holocaust, where human beings were reduced to inconsequential playthings to be broken on a whim.

These recollections of a previous life are, we learn, occurring:

mentre il sangue si ferma davanti al mostro
della morte, delle tombe senza sepoltura,
dei cadaveri senza abiti,
delle vergini senza capelli,
e delle labbra ricucite dei bimbi. (ll. 29-33)

The blood of the victims is flowing in real time, and Spurio continues by stacking a number of horrifying images one on top of the other, incrementally building the intensity of the reader's experience. Spurio begins with a conceptual figure, death, before moving to a physical but depersonalised image of 'tombe senza sepoltura'. In the following lines Spurio introduces humans into her description, beginning with faceless bodies without clothes (l. 31), before homing in on 'virgins without hair' (l. 32) with the associated connotations of innocence and youth, and finally the image centres on a brutal close-up of genocide, the 'labbra ricucite dei bimbi' (l. 33). The

children whose discarded and broken toys have populated the earlier lines of the stanza make a ghoulish reappearance with sewn-up lips. By moving from the impersonal, to the corporeal, to the innocent, to children, Spurio encompasses all the victims of the Nazi atrocities, in all their variations, finishing with the most shocking of all, the disfigured children murdered in the camps.

In response to these disturbing realities Spurio's next two-line rhymed stanza resembles an incantation from the unnamed figure: 'Pregava il silenzio per avere in dono la sordità/ pregava il buio per avere il miracolo del divenire cecità' (ll. 34-5). The prayers of the figure recall line 10, when the 'arrestati' are described as having no recourse but to pray to a God. In these lines, however, the figure does not pray to a deity, but to the two elements available: 'silence' and 'darkness', and the prayer is not for deliverance but for blindness and deafness. The author uses religious language to describe these prayers, 'dono' and 'miracolo', to demonstrate the inverted reality of the camps, where afflictions become relative blessings.

The final stanza is where the Greek mythology emerges in detail. While oblique references are made earlier in the poem 'fanciulle dei fiumi' in l. 6, for example, calling to mind the water nymphs of the Ancient Greeks, it is in lines 36-43 that the underworld of Greek mythology is explicitly described. This, then, is the response to the prayers of deliverance. Cerberus howls in the depths of the Acheron, and Hades oversees the dead who are 'trasportata stanca e senza occhi/ alla sua deriva.' This is the third reference to blindness in this poem, and ties the underworld to the camps where, as described in lines 24-5, the soldiers tore out the eyes of the prisoners. The underworld is not depicted as a release for the victims, however, and they are 'frastornata da urla impresse/ e annodate nella gola', overwhelmed by the lamentations of others' suffering, and physically oppressed. Death leads only back to the title of the poem, and the cry of the Acheron, the river of anguish which ushers the prisoners from one world into the next, offering not redemption but a continuation of their earthly pain, all they can hope for, the author suggests, is to grow increasingly insensible to their suffering.

Spurio's decision to draw parallels between the suffering in the camps and the Greek underworld is intriguing, since the choice represents a move away from the more direct Dantean allusions adopted by writers such as Primo Levi and Salvatore Quasimodo. While both the Acheron and Cerberus appear in Dante's *Inferno* (in Cantos III 78, XIV 116 and VI 13, IX 98 respectively), they are peripheral references in the *trecento* poet's work, whereas Greek mythology takes central stage in Spurio's work. Spurio builds upon an older precedent, and one which is both familiar and exotic to readers. By moving away from more standard Holocaust/Hell imagery Spurio encourages a reconsideration of the realities of the camps, and avoids the standard Holocaust clichés critiqued by Nelson and Ladin. Another dominant feature of the poem is the preponderance of negative qualifiers, 'non', 'né' and 'senza' appear multiple times throughout the poem, and this impresses on the reader the prisoner's lack of agency and their physical deprivation and suffering. Spurio does not offer a reassuring depiction in which peace is achieved through death, instead she spurns such redemptive presentations of the Holocaust to suggest that even death brings no release but a continuation of suffering.

'Il pianto dell'Acheronte' has amassed more than 4,700 views to date,⁴³ and has been selected by the editors of Scrivere to appear on the sister site RimeScelte. Despite the large number of views, there are only two author comments on the poem, with a further three comments on the poem's *bacheca* (reserved for informal comments). The comments are displayed in reverse chronological order, with the first submitted on the day of the poem's publication on the site. You Don't Know Me discusses Spurio's ability to evoke the painful physicality of the victims' infernal suffering, continuing 'sono affascinata dall'abilità dell'autrice nel descrivere l'orrore quasi come un racconto epico... straordinaria!'. You Don't Know Me's comments are a double-edged sword, praising the author's ability but also implying that Spurio's presentation of the Holocaust atrocities have taken on a mythological quality, becoming almost 'un racconto epico'. This epic quality runs the risk of distancing the reader from the

⁴³ Precise figure was 4,724 at time of writing (6th June 2017, 2.36pm).

truth of the Holocaust, making the poem an admirable literary object, rather than a call for commemoration and action.


The second comment, submitted almost precisely a year after the poem's publication, and the day after Holocaust Memorial Day, comments on the way in which the music video and mythological references complement the tone of the poem. Stefano Drakul Canepa's view is that Spurio's style is well-suited to poetry about atrocity, and offers a favourable review of this work, in line with the other commenters.

Although Spurio's adoption of mythology holds the potential to assimilate the Holocaust into a distant, fable-like world rather than impressing its urgency and relevancy for the readers, the writer arguably overcomes this by adopting the language of harsh physicality and privation, and refusing to present a neat, redemptive depiction of the victims. Spurio avoids typical, Italian depictions of the Hellish nature of the Holocaust, and her adoption of Greek mythology emphasises that the years 1933-1945 which she describes in this poem transcend space and time in their atrocity.

4.7 'Il ventre del pensiero' (27/01/2010)

Considerazione dell'autore
«In silenzio...
27 gennaio 1945»
Inserita il 21/01/2011

Giorgia Spurio
Il ventre del pensiero



Impressioni
Gocce di cadaveri di pioggia
scivolano come fronde
abbattute in danze

Scivolano pagine scritte...
mai lette... chiuse...
come petali che i libri
accolgono per seccare
tra le mani...

Rose che appassiscono
come ciglia cieche
che non spiccano nessun volo
con gli occhi
incantati dal grigio cielo
che germoglia nuvole
dal nero abito di lutto
mentre il treno va... contro tutto...
nella furia del vento
vedo spiriti nel mare
che piangono senza parlare
accarezzando angeli
che non possono baciare...

Filo nero all'orizzonte
 come confine senza dita
 del corpo di una terra senza respirare
 Come corpo monco
 che denuda il pensiero
 e lo vende come chioma di riccioli
 per i nobili passanti
 in un negozio di periferia...

E le civette perdono piume
 e poi cantano maledizioni
 che salgono come echi
 di occhi gialli che spiano il lontano silenzio
 riposto sotto il rumore delle rotaie
 e dei paesaggi che sfrecciano...

Dolci addii
 entrano in meccanismo
 nel solitario mondo
 che chiuso nella mente
 fonde pianoforti a carillon
 e canti di campi a dolci ninne nanne...
 violini di celeste dipinto
 che si comprime come macchia
 su tela di un addio...
 un addio senza nome
 né sapore.

Giorgia Spurio

27/01/2010 18:06 | 10 | 3469



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Nota dell'autore:

«(sono parole che, volendo, possono esser interpretate come percorso interiore di un'anima, come impressioni di un passeggero di questo mondo o come dedica al Giorno della Memoria)»



Commenti di altri autori:

«Anche questa mostra una capacità unica di abbinare parole a immagini e anche suoni (la musica di sottofondo non so se nasce prima o dopo di questa poesia). Non la conservo per un solo motivo: il senso di tristezza che emana e di fine che trasuda da ogni parola. Io credo nell'infinito e nel non-fine»

[Azar Rudif](#) (30/05/2010) 🍷

«entrar nel pensiero, sconfinare nella sua essenza, un pensiero che arriva all'anima che riesce a percepire rumori e suoni dell'invisibile... poesia di un'autrice che scrive con l'inchiostro della sua anima profonda... poesia molto, molto apprezzata»

[Domenica Caponiti](#) (28/01/2010) 🍷

«Pensieri al di sopra del sentire... un ascolto pieno di sensazioni, un viaggio che si propone una lettura dell'anima... malinconica... estremamente bella.»

[Veleno](#) (28/01/2010) 🍷

La bacheca della poesia:

- 😊 Bravissima...Cosa dir di più....lode! (Patrizia Portoghese)
- 😊 bellissima (Hachico)
- 😊 onirica, visionaria, febbrile, come sempre (Clodia0904)
- 😊 Poesia intensa, profonda e sentita! (Melchiorre Sergio)
- 😊 splendida ! (Claudio Giussani)
- 😊 bellissima intrisa di sconfinata tristezza (Mr Magoo)
- 😊 molto bella e sentita bravissima ciao moreno (Duca)
- 😊 profonda toccante magistrale! (Giovanna De Santis)
- 😊 profonda,toccante,struggente...Meravigliosa! (Giorgio Dello)
- 😊 Impeccabile e sconvolgente lirica. M Apprezzata (Giunone Giove)

«un viaggio dentro l'anima dell'autrice... davvero molto coinvolgente, e lo stile, come sempre, è impeccabile. ...»
Salvatore Ferranti (28/01/2010) 🍷

«I tuoi pensieri occupano ogni verso, ogni singola parola di questa poesia, impregnandola del tuo stile, rendendola straziantemente bella... e non ritornano indietro, senza aver scavato nell'anima... Capolavoro.»
Antonella Scamarda (27/01/2010) 🍷

«Altro passo Giorgia... tu mi lasci spesso senza parole. La poesia ti rappresenta... sconfina. Segnalata nell'immediato... applausi!»
Antonella Bonaffini (27/01/2010) 🍷

«Plumbea visione dell'esistenza immersa in profonde metafore ed intensa espressività, che denotano una forte capacità descrittiva ed emozionale da parte di questa abile autrice. Poesia apprezzatissima»
Silvia De Angelis (27/01/2010) 🍷

«dolorosi versi ...sensazioni e pensieri di grande malinconia, un triste veder vita... apprezzata e piaciuta moltissimo.»
Danielinagranata (27/01/2010) 🍷

«di una profondità senza limite, scendo nel pozzo a ripescare le sensazioni provate. ma come dire bella? questa è più che bella, è immensa! fiocoooooooooooooooooooo»
Enio Orsuni (27/01/2010) 🍷

🍷 sensazioni a non finire in questa stupenda poe (Enio Orsuni)
🍷 bello rileggere....per non dimenticare..mai (billabibenedetta deisanto)

«Bellissima e perfetta...
"Ed inarcandosi come ponti i pensieri tra emozioni... crepano sanguinando parole mute che seccano la gola morendo immobili e scheletrici tremando un solo istante dita allungate cercando atomi di gioie respiri nel dejavù di addii fioriti... stavolta no.»
El Corripio (27/01/2010) 🍷

Figure 4.7 'Il ventre del pensiero'⁴⁴

'Il ventre del pensiero' was written on 21st January 2011, and is the second poem in the 'Memoria e Shoah' collection which Spurio dedicates to Holocaust Memorial Day. As with 'Il pianto dell'Acheronte', there are two author comments accompanying the poem, one before and one after the poem itself. The first reads:

<<In silenzio...
27 gennaio 1945>>

and immediately ties the work to the Holocaust, by referring to the date on which Auschwitz was liberated. The second author note offers a more in-depth commentary on the poem, which Spurio describes as: 'parole che, volendo, possono esser interpretate come percorso interiore di un'anima, come impressioni di un passeggero

⁴⁴ <http://giorgiaspurio.scrivere.info/index.php?poesia=126440&t=il+ventre+del+pensiero> [accessed 7 March 2017, at 3.34pm]. Link to the music video accompanying the poem: <https://youtu.be/OiBi41X07g> Ahram, 'All'Imbrunire'.

di questo mondo o come dedica al Giorno della Memoria'. While Spurio's first author comment explicitly outlines the latter reading as her intended primary aim, it is interesting to note that only one of the ten comments on the work allude in any way to this reading of the poem. El Corripio, writing on Holocaust Memorial Day itself, offers a poem which we can assume is of their own creation, since it does not appear elsewhere on the internet, in response to Spurio's work. El Corripio's poem incorporates language which modern readers have come to associate with Holocaust writing, such as 'morendo immobili e scheletrici'. This comment therefore functions as an offer of solidarity in remembering Auschwitz and its victims. Spurio's own encouragement of multiple possible readings of the poem dilutes the power of her Holocaust message, as can be seen from the tone of the majority of the comments, which are general and focus on the author rather than Auschwitz. Most of the other author comments refer exclusively to the first of Spurio's suggested readings, and indeed many express a belief that Spurio is writing a highly personal account of her own emotions: 'un viaggio dentro l'anima dell'autrice' (Salvatore Ferranti), 'I tuoi pensieri occupano ogni verso, ogni singola parola di questa poesia' (Antonella Scamarda) and 'la poesia ti rappresenta' (Antonella Bonaffini). The reading public's hesitance to grapple with the Holocaust, as evidenced here, is one of the reasons that poetry about Auschwitz continues to be written by those who seek to ensure the atrocities of the Second World War are not forgotten.

Spurio presents this work in centred green font, accompanied by a music video and an image. The image stands to the left-hand side at the top of the page, alongside the first two and a half stanzas of the poem. An internet image search did not return any other results for this image, and therefore we can infer that it was created specifically for this poem. Certainly it is a fitting visual representation of the work, its dark, sepia tones echoing the language of the poem, and the disintegrating bridge in the sky and the train emphasising the decay and destruction, as well as the futility of Auschwitz. In the foreground of the image is a figure with a horse, an observer who witnesses the destruction above. We the viewer remain on the outside, observing the observer and removed from the darkness of the image, just as we are extraneous to Spurio's observation and exploration of the Holocaust in 'Il ventre del pensiero'.

The music video also recalls images described in the poem: Ashram's 'All'Imbrunire' is accompanied by a static black and white image of an open book with a rose placed on top. The song is a simple piano melody with melancholic vocalising. There are no words to the song, but the ululating vocals are mournful and moving. The lack of lyrics helps the reader to focus on the words of the poem, allowing the poem and the accompanying music to come together and harmonise.

Like 'Il pianto dell'Acheronte', 'Il ventre del pensiero' is a substantial poem and consists of 46 lines organised into six heterometric stanzas. The poem is largely trochaic, which creates a falling rhythm throughout the work, and the associated sensations of helplessness and inevitability which recur in Spurio's Holocaust works. Apart from frequent ellipses throughout the work, the only punctuation is a single full stop at the end of the poem, meaning the piece flows seamlessly from beginning to end, a single stream of interlinked images. The poem opens with a striking acceleration:

Gocce di cadaveri di pioggia
scivolano come fronde
abbattute in danze (ll. 1-3)

The line lengths decrease here from 10 beats in line one, to 8 in line two and 6 in line three. Line one is formed of two paeons in first position and a trochee (xuuu xuuu xu), line two is composed of a single paeon in first position and two trochees (xuuu xu xu), while the third line elides 'abbattute^in' and therefore comprises three trochees (xu xu xu). This acceleration, and the use of the present tense throughout the poem, ushers the reader into the thick of things, into the very 'ventre del pensiero'. The inclusion of 'cadaveri' in line one is jarring and turns an otherwise natural image into a disturbing deluge of bodies. The preponderance of double syllables such as 'gocce', 'pioggia' and 'abbattute' contribute to the harshness of these opening lines, which resolutely depict the horror of death associated with the Holocaust.

The second stanza begins by repeating the verb 'scivolano', this time referring to books which are destined to remain closed and unread. This is an apt metaphor for

the Holocaust victims whose lives were cut short and whose stories we'll never hear. Spurio likens the pages of these books to petals enclosed between pages to preserve them, an image which ties in with the music video Spurio has selected as an accompaniment to the poem. The image of a rose returns at the start of stanza three, this time a wilting rose which suggests death and decay. Natural images continue to abound in stanza three, and Spurio moves from floral imagery to weather, seamlessly linking the two with her inclusion of the verb 'germoglia' in line 14. Spurio then uses personification to describe the clouds which germinate in the grey sky 'dal nero abito di lutto' (l. 15). Introducing a human element into a poem which has hitherto focussed on the natural world serves to remind the reader of the very human loss implied in the following line: 'mentre il treno va... contro tutto...' (l. 16). Further consolidating the link between death and the train (which we infer is a reference to the train convoys to Nazi camps) is the rhyming couplet which links the two lines: 'dal nero abito di lutto/ mentre il treno va... contro tutto...' (ll. 15-6). This is one of only two rhyming couplets in the poem and therefore ensures that the lines stand out for the reader.

Spurio continues the meteorological references which abound in this stanza, referring in line 17 to the 'furia del vento', creating a harsh natural world in which she presents images of futility: 'spiriti [...] / che piangono senza parlare' (ll. 18-9), 'angeli/ che non possono baciare' (ll. 20-1). As we witnessed in 'Il pianto dell'Acheronte', Spurio often uses negatives in order to express the oppression and enforced lack of agency of the Holocaust victims. The use of three end-rhymes in lines 18-21, 'mare', 'parlare' and 'baciare' imbues these lines with a haunting resonance, and ties together the two sets of figures, the 'spiriti' and the 'angeli', who are both unable to fully express themselves and are entombed both in their wordless embrace, and 'nel mare'.

Stanza four is dense with similes, stacking unexpected images one on top of the other in a disorientating description. The stanza begins 'Filo nero all'orizzonte' (l. 22), a loaded term which calls to mind the 'filo spinato' of the concentration camps. The natural elision of 'nero^all'orizzonte' renders this opening line a perfect trochaic tetrameter, however it is the only regular line of the stanza and the rhythm breaks

down, accelerating with the inclusion of increasing numbers of unstressed beats as the images begin to merge and blur, overlaying each other as the stanza progresses. The lack of punctuation throughout this poem further accentuates the subsumation of images, and the enjambment renders it difficult to ascertain where one image ends and another begins. The black wire is: 'come confine senza dita/ del corpo di una terra senza respirare' (ll. 23-4), there is an overlapping of two image groups in these lines: 'orizzonte' (l. 22), 'confine' (l. 23), and 'terra' (l. 24) referring to geographical landmarks and 'dita' (l. 23), 'corpo' and 'respirare' (l. 24) alluding to the human body. This personification of the land is also the personification of the black wire in the opening line of the stanza, and therefore by inference, the suffocating personification of the Nazi camps. Although line 24 is not endstopped Spurio uses a capital letter at the start of line 25, which introduces an almost subconscious caesura before the next simile, 'Come corpo monco' (l. 25), which replaces and elaborates on the unbreathing body of the preceding line. This maimed body is another image of suffering tied to the camps, and one which in the final lines of the stanza is described in terms of exposure and abasement. This broken body:

[...] denuda il pensiero
 e lo vende come chioma di riccioli
 per i nobili passanti
 in un negozio di periferia... (ll. 26-9)

The inclusion of the word 'pensiero' in line 26 is significant, since it recalls the title of the poem. The thought is here exposed and sold as a commodity to wealthy passers by. The reference to the 'mane of curls' (l. 27) tempers the seemingly innocent image of suburban trade, by introducing a reference to the shaved heads and resulting piles of hair found in the Nazi camps. The effect of Spurio's stacking of images is a sense of disorientation and bewilderment, the similes generate a mass of vivid pictures which swirl and replace one another, flashing up and then receding. In this way Spurio defies the quick reading strategies common of internet reading: she demands a closer engagement, an *impegno* on the part of the reader, and they are rewarded for their efforts with a literary experience which effectively recreates to some extent the chaos and confusion of Auschwitz.

The penultimate stanza begins with another shift, and a return to the natural world, although described in unnatural terms. Lines 30-1 depict a degeneration of the natural order: owls lose their feathers and sing curses. These curses resound, 'salgono come echi' (l. 32), but the curses are, it seems, aimed at the owls themselves and their:

[...] occhi gialli che spiano il lontano silenzio
riposto sotto il rumore delle rotaie
e dei paesaggi che sfrecciano... (ll. 33-5)

The owl, a symbol of wisdom, witnesses the true silence masked behind the noise of the train which, as we know from line 16, travels perversely onwards 'contro tutto'. In a poem which explicitly outlines its intent to commemorate the Holocaust, the train image is imbued with references to the convoys which deported victims from around Europe to Auschwitz. The silence, we can infer, is the silence of those murdered in the Nazi camps. Though the curse is nominally aimed at the owls who witnessed this destruction, it also implicitly condemns all those who saw and did nothing.

There is a marked shift in tone in the final stanza, which begins with 'Dolci adii' (l. 36), which recalls the high register of classical poetry. These closing lines refer to a range of sounds, fused together to create a slightly disturbing cacophony. Line 41 epitomises this clashing of disparate noises, with the merging of 'canti di campi a dolci ninne nanne...'. The 'canti di campi' is a haunting reference to the songs prisoners were forced to sing in the camps, and the macabre nature of this enforced music is heightened by the contrast of sweet lullabies. The layering of the sounds described: 'pianoforti', 'carillon' (l. 40), 'canti di campi', 'ninne nanne' (l. 41) and 'violini' (l. 42) converge to form a stain:

su tela di un addio...
un addio senza nome
né sapore (ll. 44-6)

The sweet goodbyes which open the stanza become indelibly marked, therefore, by the cacophony described, and become a nameless, flavourless goodbye. As recurs

often in Spurio's Holocaust writing, she concludes the stanza in negative terms, including 'senza' and 'né' in the final two lines. In the space of a stanza Spurio moves from a classical topos of high poetry to the reality of Auschwitz. Just as in the preceding stanza the writer cuts through the noise to the silence underneath, this stanza repeats this action, arriving at the inexpressible goodbyes of the camps. Spurio's author comment at the start of the poem offers a condensed expression of this sentiment: 'in silenzio'. Even before the poem begins she outlines the ineffability of the Holocaust, and the poem arrives at this same conclusion in its final lines. Silence, noise, absence and overlapping, 'Il ventre del pensiero' is a layering of contradictions and contrasting images and sensations, an assault on the reader's senses which recreates in some way the chaos of Auschwitz, similar to Guccini's aural assault on the reader in 'Lager' (see section 2.8). It is a mournful lament, heightened for the online reader by the accompanying music.

Although it has received fewer views than 'Il pianto dell'Acheronte',⁴⁵ 'Il ventre del pensiero' has received a far more vocal response from readers than the previous poem. There are ten author comments, and twelve comments on the *bacheca*. As stated above, most of the comments view the poem as an autobiographical account, rather than a poetic exploration of the Holocaust. The comments describe the poem as moving and profound, and only billbì benedetta del santo openly acknowledges the poem's driving imperative, writing 'bello rileggere... per non [d]imenticare...mai'. The poem El Corripio includes in their own comment is a striking example of how host sites such as Scrivere can lead to flourishing online communities in which poetry stimulates debate, engaged readings and the creation of new poetry. Although the comments demonstrate a range of interpretations, Spurio's fellow authors all attest to the poem's success as an evocative poem, and an intimate response to the atrocities of World War Two.

⁴⁵ 'Il ventre del pensiero' had received 3,580 views, as opposed to 'Il pianto dell'Acheronte's 4,724 at the time of writing (6th June 2017, 3.09pm).

Considerazione dell'autore

«"Giornata della Memoria."
27 gennaio 1945»

Inserita il 21/01/2011

Giorgia Spurio

Il gas dietro le sbarre

Sociale

Su strade ragni
verso monti di capelli
d'anima bianche

Singhiozzo di lupo nuvola
bela il deforme sogno
al ruscello raccoglie ossa

Furono fucili
Piombo disarmi
Alla scabbia
sulla pelle uccider
pulci e tarme
Contro la rabbia
ringhia la bava

Mi dissero pazza...
Oltre i cieli vidi angeli
anoressici dolori
Li uccisero contro il muro
Alzarono non ali
E da sotto le finte piume spararono

Furono prigionì
di fame che aveva il nome
dei tuberì le loro bucce

Saliva persa
nel rivolo di sangue
le mai lacrime.

E i bimbi... al filo spinato
furono lasciati soli
agli scheletrici ingressi degli inferni.

Giorgia Spurio

22/06/2010 00:10 | 10 | 4048

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Nota dell'autore:

«A volte va ricordato il dolore anche se devastante.
Le crudeltà avvenute nella storia dovrebbero svegliarci per farci capire che le crudeltà che ancora avvengono dovrebbero finire...
L'Olocausto e i suoi campi da sterminio furono oltre ogni terribile immaginazione.
Un bacio a mio nonno.
www.usmmm.org/wlc/it/article.php?ModuleId=10005142
www.liceoberchet.it/eventi/mutti2.htm
www.destinazioneauschwitz.com/opera/opera_pdf/testimonianze.pdf»



Commenti di altri autori:

«Ancora dopo aver letto libri, documenti non riesco a capire come sia potuto accadere che un folle sia stato tanto capace di piagare una nazione intera... e aver compiuto tutti i massacri compiuti, popolo ebreo, zingari, persone diversamente abili etc, etc... morivano queste anime mentre il Capo dolcemente accarezzava i suoi pastori tedeschi...

Bellissima, commovente poesia»

[Rosy Marchettini](#) (30/01/2011) 🍷

«Bè, credo che questa poesia possa riunire chiunque sotto un'unica visione delle cose... non ci dovrebbe essere un solo essere umano che rifiuti la natura bestiale dell'olocausto... è evidente che sia stata una delle più grandi vergogne del genere umano... enio parla di proposta per debellare la fame nel mondo: in effetti già Swift l'aveva proposto secoli prima, ma era una satira feroce contro il disinteresse delle istituzioni; purtroppo questa è stata realtà... riflettiamo sulla necessità di non abbassare mai la guardia... la follia di un sogno di potere sconsiderato non è confinata in un periodo, ma contamina tutta la storia... quindi, che si aprano gli occhi affinché non si ripeta MAI PIU' BRAVA GIORGIA!»

La bacheca della poesia:

😊 Con profondo dolore... la conservo... (Nemesi Marina Perozzi)

😊 toccante e bellissima sei stupenda poesia ciao (Splendido Leotta Michele)

😊 stupenda. (Miky 71)

😊 meravigliosa (Dario Fociani)

😊 bellissima riflessione (Citareti Loretta Margherita)

😊 Molto bella Giorgia. Un abbraccio. (Dalassa)

😊 Bravissima, Giorgia. Adoro il tuo modo di scrivere (Zenit y Nadir)

😊 Senza parole... solo un forte applauso! (Rita Minniti)

[Luigi88](#) (22/06/2010) 🍷

«è una poesia che mi ha commosso fino alle lacrime
da sempre molto sensibile a questi dolorosi ricordi
una poesia PER NON DIMENTICARE tutto l'orrore
i miei più sentiti complimenti ancora una volta Unica Giorgia
da conservare»

[Danielinagranata](#) (22/06/2010) 🍷

«nel dolore una riflessione blasfema:
forse decimando così l'essere umano
hitler voleva risolvere il problema
della fame nel mondo?
meno siamo e più ce n'è per tutti?
una poe che rimarca lo sdegno già esistente.
apprezzata e tanto.»

[Enio Orsuni](#) (22/06/2010) 🍷

«La memoria non deve mai spegnersi ma dovrebbe giustamente servire da monito affinché certe "bestialità" non si debbano più perpetrare. Eppure è storia di tutti i giorni: prevaricazione e sterminio dei più deboli! Bellissima poesia.»

[Anna Maria Obadon](#) (22/06/2010) 🍷

«L'uomo ha insita la cattiveria e non imparerà mai nulla, mai servono le esperienze di dolore, sempre pronto a ripetere gli errori per il corso e ricorso della storia. Grande spunto di riflessione questi versi che raccontano di orrori vissuti e sin dalla prima strofa per quei capelli d'anime bianche. Le immagini sono molto significative, infatti. Molto apprezzata!»

[Raggioluminoso](#) (22/06/2010) 🍷

«mentre ti leggevo... cantavo...
lo chiedo come può l'uomo
uccidere un suo fratello,
eppure siamo a milioni
in polvere qui nel vento.
[...]
lo chiedo quando sarà
che l'uomo potrà imparare
a vivere senza ammazzare,
e il vento si poserà F. G

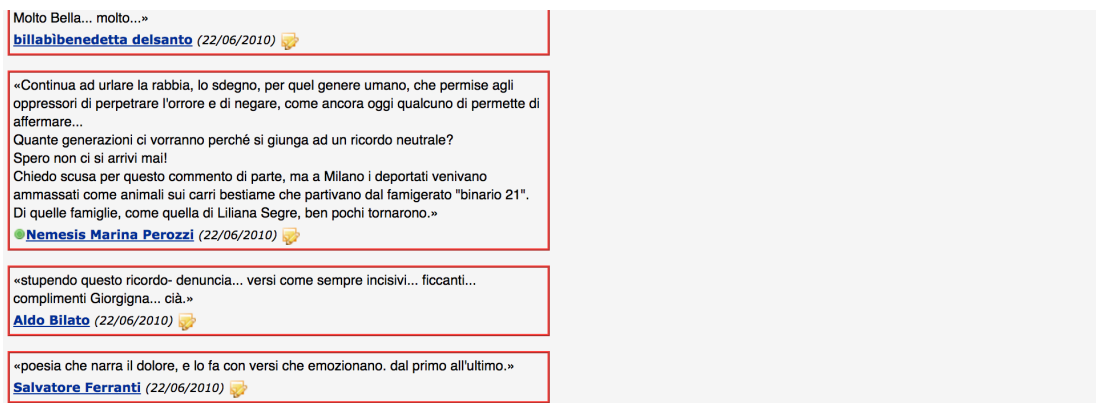


Figure 4.8 ‘Il gas dietro le sbarre’⁴⁶

‘Il gas dietro le sbarre’ was published on Scrivere on 22nd June 2010, and on 21st January 2011 Spurio added an author note linking it, like ‘Il pianto dell’Acheronte’ and ‘Il ventre del pensiero’, with Holocaust Memorial Day. Spurio’s author notes after the poem’s conclusion differ quite substantially from those seen in the two previous poems, since they include not only a personal commentary, but also links to further reading. Spurio begins:

A volte va ricordato il dolore anche se devastante.
 Le crudeltà avvenute nella storia dovrebbero svegliarci per farci capire che le
 crudeltà che ancora avvengono dovrebbero finire...
 L’Olocausto e i suoi campi da sterminio furono oltre ogni terribile
 immaginazione.
 Un bacio a mio nonno.

Spurio’s comments here act as a call to action: though it might be painful, she writes, it is vital to remember the past, since recalling past atrocities should galvanise us to bring current horrors to an end. The author begins by referring obliquely to the Holocaust using general terms such as ‘dolore’ and ‘crudeltà’, but continues by explicitly naming ‘l’Olocausto e i suoi campi da sterminio’, tying them to this poem. This reference to the unfathomability of the Holocaust is pertinent and reinforced literally by Spurio’s authorial decision to avoid depicting the interior of the camps in this work, choosing instead to remain outside the threshold of Auschwitz in the final line of the poem. The author, whose other comments tend to be factual statements

⁴⁶<http://giorgiaspurio.scrivere.info/index.php?poesia=150169&t=Il+gas+dietro+le+sbarre> [accessed 7 March 2017, at 3.42pm]. Link to the music video accompanying the poem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnbTQCvgwjs&feature=youtu.be> Ulver, ‘Naturnmystikk’.

tying the poems to Holocaust Memorial Day here offers a highly personal dedication, writing 'Un bacio a mio nonno'. The lack of further explanation leads the reader to infer that the writer's grandfather may have had a personal experience of the Nazi camps, and one which Spurio seeks to commemorate in this and her other Holocaust poems. The author includes three links at the end of her comment, the first to a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum webpage, which discusses 'I bimbi durante l'Olocausto'; the second to an article on 'Foto proibite' by Roberto Mutti, which displays a number of photographs taken either within the camps by inmates, or shortly after liberation by soldiers and journalists. The final link was defunct at the time of writing.⁴⁷ Spurio has gone to significant effort to include these links, breaking up the URLs with spaces to disguise them since the Scrivere terms and conditions state '[n]on è possibile la pubblicazione di [...] indirizzi di siti'. Including these informative links is a clear attempt to contextualise this work and complement it with further information for the reader. This demonstrates Spurio's commitment to educate the reader both through her own work, and by encouraging further study of reliable sources such as the USHMM.

Alongside her poem Spurio includes a striking black and white image of a wall covered in bullet marks, and a commemorative plaque. This photo depicts the place in which seven partisans were murdered at the hands of 'Nazi-fascisti' at Forte della Madonna degli Angeli (Savona, Liguria) on 27th December 1943. By choosing an image of specifically Italian suffering at the hands of the Nazis Spurio ensures that her poem resonates with her Italian-speaking reader. The image is a fitting accompaniment to 'Il gas dietro le sbarre' which describes the shooting of prisoners against a wall. Spurio therefore ties in her own imagined Holocaust scenario with an actual, Italian, instance of Nazi violence.

As with her other Holocaust poems Spurio has selected a low-key musical accompaniment to her poem. This music video for Ulver's 'Naturnmystikk' shows a static image of grass in muted tones, an understated image which does not detract

⁴⁷ www.destinazioneauschwitz.com/opera/opera_pdf/testimonianze.pdf was checked on 4th April 2017.

from the poem, and ensures the reader's focus remains firmly on the author's words. The music, which starts playing automatically in the reader's browser, consists of a 3/4 guitar melody in a minor key. Approximately a minute into the piece the guitar solo is accompanied by a flute, before returning to unaccompanied guitar less than a minute later. This temporary duet creates a moving crescendo as the reader progresses through the poem, and the music and image present a haunting accompaniment to this Holocaust poem.

'Il gas dietro le sbarre' begins *in media res*:

Su strade ragni
verso monti di capelli
d'anima bianche (ll. 1-3)

The reader is compelled along the spidery paths towards a horrifying image of Auschwitz: mountains of hair belonging to the dead. These relics of the murdered prisoners are also alluded to in 'Il ventre del pensiero' and act as physical evidence of the scale of the Nazi atrocities. This image, a perverse metaphor which ties together nature and horror, echoes the techniques used by Quasimodo in 'Il mio paese è l'Italia', where he refers to 'colline di cadaveri' (see section 2.5).

This first stanza, one of seven stanzas in this comparatively short, 28-line poem, does not refer directly either to Auschwitz or the dead, but it sits alongside the image of the 'fucilazione di Forte della Madonna degli Angeli' and is preceded by Spurio's own comments linking the poem to Holocaust Memorial Day, making the reference intuitive. As with other Holocaust poems, such as Quasimodo's 'Il mio paese è l'Italia', Spurio contrasts the natural and the unnatural, appropriating the 'monti' to express the scale of man-made destruction at Auschwitz. The second stanza also abounds with distorted images in which the natural order is overturned: 'deforme sogno' (l. 5) and the pastoral image of someone at the river's edge with a basket in line six which concludes with the horrifying realisation that it is 'ossa' and not fish that is being collected.

Spurio's poetry is, like Quasimodo's and Celan's, often difficult to understand, with images interwoven without a clear sense of what qualifies what. 'Il gas dietro le

sbarre' is no exception, and the author's characteristic minimal use of punctuation further adds to the reader's disorientation. This effect is striking in stanza three, where it becomes difficult to discern the subject(s) and object(s) of the lines. Notably, the author introduces 'fucili' in line seven, which is aligned with the bullet holes in the black and white image Spurio has selected to accompany her poem. Yet the shots are discharged in this case to counter the itch caused by fleas and vermin, a gross overreaction, as well as an allusion to the Nazi terminology which labelled Jews, gypsies and the other 'undesirables' in such derogatory terms.

The poem continues with the introduction of a female figure in line 14, with the inflected first person: 'Mi dissero pazza...', and the promise of salvation in line 15, '[o]ltre i cieli vidi angeli', a trochaic line which, with the elision between 'oltre^i', effectively contains four internal half-rhymes with harmonious terminal inflection. The comforting image of the angels is therefore sustained by the rhythm and rhyme of the line, before being overturned with a mocking disjunction between sense and sound in the following line: 'anoressici dolori' (l. 16), which continues the internal rhyme, but presents an image of frailty rather than celestial radiance. Depersonalised death is introduced in line 17 'Li uccisero contro il muro', a reference which ties in Spurio's chosen image of the bullet marks along the wall. There is, however, no clear indication of who is killing whom. The reader is left to deduce this in the following lines, and while the angels are the obvious victims they in fact emerge as the perpetrators, and their very angelic nature is unmasked as fake: 'Alzarono non ali/ E da sotto le finte piume spararono' (ll. 18-19). As is typical of Spurio's Holocaust poetry, she emphasises the absence of attributes, and so the 'angels' lift their 'non ali' (l. 18): what initially appeared as an image of divine salvation is revealed to be a deadly illusion. The 'fake feathers' also function as a reference to the *Parteiadler*, the essential Nazi symbolism which featured an eagle with wings outstretched above a swastika. Those firing are doing so under the auspices of the Nazi regime.

Spurio continues with disjointed images, shying away from the canonical language of Holocaust literature. She takes a fairly typical description 'Furono prigionieri/ di fame' (ll. 20-1) but distorts it with unexpected and contorted language '[...] che aveva il nome/ dei tubercoli le loro bucce' (ll. 21-2). There is a lack of agreement between verb

and noun in the penultimate stanza, a grammatical disjunction which occurs elsewhere in various forms throughout the poem (including 'anima bianche' in l. 3) and forces the reader to struggle to their own understanding, the ambiguity allowing for a number of different readings. Spurio further challenges the reader with an unexpected adjective in l. 25: 'le mai lacrime', which is characteristic of the author's style which, in a Holocaust context, consistently focuses on absence. The reader would naturally expect the line to read 'le mie lacrime', but Spurio challenges complacency and enforces a closer reading from her internet reader: this poem cannot be processed with the quick scanning reading habits of the online generation and, in line with her Holocaust subject matter, Spurio's writing style insists on a more sustained, engaged style of reading.

The final lines of the poem are the most conventional in terms of language and images used. This unexpected clarity is heightened by the distortion and difficulty of the preceding lines, rendering them particularly hard-hitting and lucid:

E i bimbi... al filo spinato
furono lasciati soli
agli scheletrici ingressi degli inferni. (ll. 26-8)

The child victims of the Holocaust, the focus of the USHMM link Spurio includes in her author comments, come to the fore at the close of the poem, standing abandoned and alone at the threshold of the camps. There is little ambiguity as to what fate the camps hold for the young prisoners, given the imagery of death which abounds in the final line. It is also worth mentioning that the title of this poem provides a further insight into the fate of those who entered the camps. Spurio's title, 'Il gas dietro le sbarre', is an unequivocal reference to the gas chambers which are, in fact, absent from the body of the poem. The author does not directly outline the atrocities the majority of child prisoners were subjected to, but her title invites the reader to arrive at an understanding of the horror they faced. The loss of young lives is always especially tragic, a fact which other poets in this thesis have acknowledged in their own work. Francesco Guccini's 'Auschwitz', also known as 'Bambino nel vento', which was analysed in section 2.7, takes full advantage of the hugely emotive potential of a child victim. The author comments for this poem are evidence of a

similar capturing of public imagination. While Spurio's other Holocaust poems have elicited responses which focus on her style and tend not to allude to her subject matter, each of the comments on this poem directly engage with the Holocaust past, in a number of surprising ways.

As of 4th April 2017 'Il gas dietro le sbarre' had been read 4,107 times, and had received ten author comments. Nine of the ten comments were written on the day this poem was released online, 22nd June 2010, suggesting that Spurio has an audience which actively seeks out her new work, and certainly a number of the comments suggest an intimacy with Spurio's work: 'versi come sempre incisivi' (Aldo Bilato), 'i miei più sentiti complimenti ancora una volta Unica Giorgia' (Danielinagranata). The comments of fellow authors on Scrivere offer a clear indication that Spurio's work is fulfilling art's post-Auschwitz imperative to inform and to ensure the Holocaust is never forgotten. Aldo Bilato refers to this poem as a 'ricordo-denuncia', a fitting term for a work which criticises the perpetrators indirectly, by presenting vivid images of the atrocities they committed and the lives destroyed. Each of the ten fellow authors ruminates on Auschwitz, genocide and memory, with one writer quoting Francesco Guccini's 'Auschwitz' and therefore drawing a clear comparison between the *cantautore's* work and this internet poem. One comment is controversial, demonstrating the issues associated with the complete freedom of speech afforded by the internet. Enio Orsuni offers a verse in defence of Hitler:

nel dolore una riflessione blasfema:
forse decimando così l'essere umano
hitler voleva risolvere il problema
della fame nel mondo?
meno siamo e più ce n'è per tutti?

Another author offers a rejection of this perspective, alluding to the poem's ability to 'riunire chiunque sotto un'unica visione delle cose', continuing 'non ci dovrebbe essere un solo essere umano che rifiuti la natura bestiale dell'olocausto' (luigi88). Orsuni's own comment suggests that he is aware of the controversial nature of his words, terming them 'blasfema'. Orsuni is a satirical writer in the tradition of Trilussa,

whose published works include a “blasphemous” re-writing of the Bible in Roman dialect, which suggests that the author is more concerned here with the limits of satire than the memory of the Holocaust. While the internet provides a platform for people of all political perspectives to voice their opinions, in this case it is precisely Spurio’s poem which resoundingly undermines a denial or pardoning of the Holocaust. The images she presents are so striking, and in the case of ‘Il gas dietro le sbarre’ so emotive with the references to children, that her poems not only withstand opposition but galvanise her readers to challenge those who seek to undermine the suffering of the victims of Nazism.

4.9 ‘Dentro la vernice del ghiaccio’ (27/01/2016)

Considerazione dell'autore	
<p>«Ho braccia fredde, come binari, senza che io torni -sperando, nel tuo ritorno-»</p> <p>Inserita il 27/01/2017</p>	
Giorgia Spurio	
Dentro la vernice del ghiaccio	Morte
<p>Brivido, come un bivio il mare e il buio, la neve e il cielo, la strada e i negozi chiusi, un sacco che il cuore contiene di ansie con ali senza penne né piume né matite né respiri.</p> <p>Ho braccia fredde, come binari, senza che io torni -sperando, nel tuo ritorno-.</p> <p>Ho tese silenziose lancette del tempo e dell'incubo, e cado in una vernice d'argento, e cado, affogo, e questo treno non ha fermata, scivola dove è ghiaccio, dove è argento, sul mio corpo.</p> <p>A frammenti, pallottole e pelle, vetro e sapone, e nuda ti ho vista piangere a proteggere il segreto nascosto dove il grembo non può avere peccato, dove c'è la madre che ha procreato il nostro amore.</p>	

E le mura sono reti e gabbie,
e i corpi non hanno più organi,
svuotati, morti e deportati,
silenzi tra le mani delle ragazze.


Capelli – tagliati –
tra le mani delle donne.

E in un attimo
Non ti riconoscevo più...

E in un attimo
ti ho cercato,
tra gli occhi e le cieche
vecchie insolenti solite
menzogne.

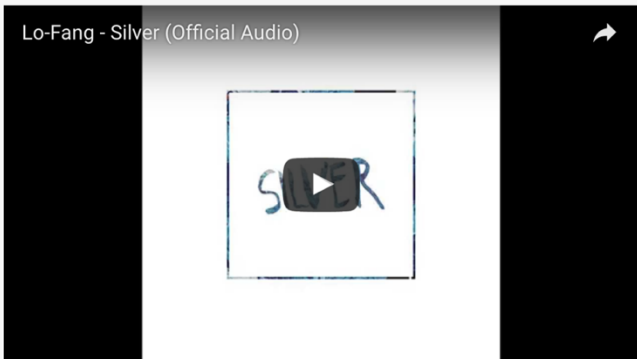
E in un attimo...
In un attimo
Ti ho perso.

Giorgia Spurio 27/01/2016 23:04 | 494

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Nota dell'autore:
«Giornata della Memoria.»

Lo-Fang - Silver (Official Audio)



La bacheca della poesia:
Non ci sono messaggi in bacheca.

Figure 4.9 ‘Dentro la vernice del ghiaccio’⁴⁸

The most recent of Giorgia Spurio’s poems in the ‘Memoria e Shoah’ collection, ‘Dentro la vernice del ghiaccio’ has received far fewer views than the other poems analysed here, just 542 views at the time of writing.⁴⁹ Uploaded to Scrivere on Holocaust Memorial Day 2016, with an author note in line with the poems analysed

⁴⁸ <http://giorgiaspurio.scrivere.info/index.php?poesia=405065&t=Dentro+la+vernice+del+ghiaccio> [accessed 7 March 2017, at 3.48pm]. Link to the music video accompanying the poem: <https://youtu.be/ARNh-7zI5Tc> Lo-Fang, ‘Silver’.

⁴⁹ 11th April 2017, at 11.00am. When compared to the screenshot above, which displays 494 views on 7th March, we can see that the poem received approximately 50 views in the space of a month.

above of 'Giornata della Memoria', Spurio added a second author note, before the poem, exactly a year later which is formed of lines 8-10 of the poem itself. There is no accompanying image for this poem, and no comments from other authors or readers. The font selected is black Times New Roman, which is left-aligned. This basic, sparse presentation ensures that the reader's emphasis is on the words themselves. Spurio has included a music video, Lo-Fang's 'Silver' which, in line with the poems above, does not contain dynamic video content, but a static image, in this case the word 'Silver'. Spurio's consistent selection of music videos with no moving content demonstrates a desire to ensure that the reader's visual focus is the words of her poems rather than on the music video. This strengthens the audio-visual pairing of the music and the poem: the words replace the static music video to become the dynamic visual component of the music. As with Placebo's 'Holocaust', which accompanies 'Il pianto dell'Acheronte', Lo-Fang's 'Silver' is sung in English, a language with which Spurio's readers are not necessarily conversant. The lyrics are mournful, and the accompanying music is slightly discordant, composed of various strata and a number of different instruments, including electronic synthesisers. The musical interludes of the song create a slightly ominous and oppressive sensation, while the vocals introduce periods of relative calm into the song and are accompanied by fewer instruments and more conventional melodies. The minor key of the piece is in keeping with the content of the poem it accompanies.

'Dentro la vernice del giacchio' is, as the theme category to the right of the title tells the reader, about death. Here Spurio moves away from the previous poems discussed above, which fall into either the 'sociale' or 'impressioni' category. This poem is openly about loss, and quite specifically about the loss which is commemorated each year on Holocaust Memorial Day. The title of the poem suggests entrapment within ice, and there are several references to the cold within the work, an allusion perhaps to the harsh conditions to which the prisoners of the Nazi camps were exposed. The poem begins with a physical reaction to the cold, 'Brivido', and the 'b', 'i' and 'o' sounds are repeated again in 'bivio' and 'buio' in lines one and two, creating internal half-rhymes which drive the poem onwards. There are no active verbs in the first stanza, only 'contiene' which by definition evokes stasis rather than dynamism; as

discussed in section 2.6, Quasimodo uses the same technique in the first stanza of 'Aushwitz' to create a similar effect of frozen horror. Spurio uses the stanza to stack a number of nouns, 16 in total across the opening seven lines. This creates the impression of an observer surveying their environs, and the elision between the two images per line in ll. 2-4:

il mare^e^il buio,
la neve^e^il cielo,
la strada^e^i negozi chiusi

makes the objects run together, and creates a rising iambic rhythm, which reaches a crescendo in the final lines of the stanza, where the rhythm accelerates with the inclusion of an increasing number of unstressed hyperbeats, culminating in paeons in line seven. It is also striking that the author moves from very solid, quotidian images to more abstract, metaphorical descriptions as the stanza progresses, as if a break from normalcy is needed to fully convey the Holocaust reality. The stanza concludes with the following depiction:

un sacco che il cuore contiene
di ansie con ali senza penne
né piume né matite né respiri. (ll. 5-7)

As has been discussed above with reference to the previous poems analysed in this chapter, much of Spurio's Holocaust poetry focuses on absence, and these lines adhere to this pattern, with the use of 'senza' and 'né' in the final two lines. The author also uses the homonymical nature of 'penne', which could mean either 'pens' or 'feathers' to conflate the two potentials in the final line of the stanza, which refers to both the absence of feathers and pencils. The fears the author describes therefore have no means to fly and escape, and no means to be expressed through writing.

The second stanza, one of nine in this 43 line poem, is recreated in the author's comments before the poem:

Ho braccia fredde, come binari,
senza che io torni
- sperando, nel tuo ritorno -. (ll. 8-10)

These lines introduce the use of the first person into the poem, a figure who is immediately tied to the Holocaust through the use of 'binari' and its inevitable associations in this context to the train lines which brought convoys of prisoners to the Nazi camps. The punctuation in this line is striking, with the use of dashes which create caesuras in the final line. Spurio's punctuation in this poem is more copious than in the other poems discussed here, and there appears to have been a more conscious thought about the incorporation of different forms of punctuation on the flow of the line, and the effect on sense units. Spurio's use of punctuation isolates the word 'sperando' in l. 10, making it stand out and offering a vivid, if short-lived, expression of hope. As well as the introduction of a first person in this stanza, the final line also introduces an implied interlocutor, a 'tu' whose return is wistfully awaited. The half-rhyme of 'torni' and 'ritorno' which are derivatives of the same stem, ties the first and second person together, uniting them linguistically if not metaphorically or physically.

There is a sinister tone to stanza three, which describes the tense and silent passage of time, and nightmares. The eight-line stanza accelerates onward towards the full stop on l. 18, driven by the repeated 'e' at the start of lines 12-15, the references to falling, and the decreasing line lengths, which shorten from the decasyllabic line 15 to just four syllables in line 18. The description of falling: 'e cado in una vernice d'argento' (l. 13), recalls both the poem's title, and links in the author's choice of song accompaniment, which is entitled 'Silver'. The following line, 'e cado, affogo' (l. 14) is formed of two rhythmically identical feet, separated with a caesura (uxu , uxu), the inclusion of a comma ensuring that the reader does not elide the two words but must focus on the full ramifications of each. The poetic 'io' is falling, drowning and, through the repetition of 'e', this is causally linked to the following line, where the train which is omnipresent in Holocaust writing makes an appearance: 'e questo treno non ha fermata' (l. 15). The train has no stop, no destination, but skids on the ice, on the body of the speaker.

Stanza four begins, fittingly, with 'A frammenti' (l. 19) and continues by presenting another list of fragmented, stacked images:

pallottole e pelle,
vetro e sapone, e nuda
ti ho vista piangere (ll. 20-2)

the enjambment between lines 21 and 22, and the repetition of 'e' cause the reader to naturally interpret 'nuda' as if it is a continuation of the list, and we only learn upon continuing to the next line that the focus has shifted away from things onto a vulnerable person, naked and tearful. The following lines imply a sibling relationship between the 'io' and the 'tu', due to the reference to 'la madre/ che ha procreato il nostro amore.' (ll. 26-7). The effect of Spurio's authorial decisions in this stanza is to first depict the chaos and violence of the camps, where bullets and bodies are strewn around, before homing in on an individual and their very humanity, exposed and personal. The word 'love' which concludes this stanza is a secret to be hidden and protected, something different in substance to the physical objects in the camps.

Spurio moves away from this ethereal love to the solid, distressing reality of the Holocaust, writing:

E le mura sono reti e gabbie,
e i corpi non hanno più organi
svuotati, morti e deportati,
silenzi tra le mani delle ragazze. (ll. 28-31)

There is a shocking double desecration in these lines: the emptied bodies, devoid of organs, and the 'ragazze' who are witness to these horrifying corpses. Within the camps the human body, which in the previous stanza was described in fragile terms: naked, tearful and protecting a secret, here becomes simple: 'svuotati, morti e deportati'. The elision of the conjunction 'e' renders this a trochaic line, rhythmically tying together the three adjectives and the connotations of discarded and defiled human life they offer.

The shortest stanza of the poem, lines 34-5 recall other Holocaust poetry, including Primo Levi's 'Shemà' (see section 1.6), where the survivor-writer describes the inmates as 'senza capelli e senza nome' (l. 11). Here Spurio employs dashes again to create a dramatic caesura in the line: 'Capelli – tagliati – ' (l. 34) these two words are rhythmically identical and naturally fit together, though here the image is unnatural,

mountains of hair 'tra le mani delle donne' (l. 35). Again, Spurio refers to the physical relics of Auschwitz: the hair of the dead, which she alludes to in several of her other Holocaust poems. Here, again, there is a female presence witnessing this physical humiliation and degeneration. Spurio very consciously makes this poem female-focussed, by referring to 'ragazze' in line 31 and 'donne' in line 33. The imagined interlocutor is also female, as is evident from the gendered adjective 'nuda' and verb 'vista' in ll. 21-2. We know from testimonial accounts that men and women were separated at the entrance to the Nazi camps, and the author has chosen to focus on the specifically female victims of the Holocaust here. Not only is the physical demise of the female inmates depicted in this poem, but also the traumatising physical contact between the living and the deceased.

The author shifts tack in the final three stanzas of the poem, writing again in the first person to an unnamed interlocutor: 'E in un attimo/Non ti riconoscevo più...' (ll. 34-5). Spurio leaves room for ambiguity here, and it is unclear whether she does not recognise the interlocutor because they have become one of the empty bodies, because her hair has been cut, or because she is one of the female witnesses, indelibly marked and altered by what she has seen. The repetition of 'in un attimo' four times in the final ten lines imbues the close of the poem with an urgency and stresses the irrevocable, destructive reality of life in Auschwitz. The poetic voice searches for the other:

tra gli occhi e le cieche
vecchie insolenti solite
menzogne. (ll. 38-40)

These three lines are dense with consonance and internal rhymes, and the lack of punctuation and use of enjambment creates a driving force which compels the reader onwards. Spurio stacks four adjectives across lines 38 and 39, creating two pairs of half-rhymes: 'cieche' and 'vecchie', and 'insolenti' and 'solite', all of which qualify the shortest line of the poem, the single word 'menzogne'. These dense lines stand in stark contrast to the following final lines of the poem:

E in un attimo...
In un attimo

Ti ho perso. (ll. 41-3)

The imagined other cannot be found, not even amongst the lies. The last three lines of the poem contract in length from six syllables, to five, to four, physically re-enacting the loss and disappearance of the woman.

‘Dentro la vernice del ghiaccio’ is a poem which grapples with loss: both of the self and of a loved one. Spurio presents the Holocaust landscape in which familial relationships were torn apart and people were reduced to broken parts. The lines generally decrease in length as the poem progresses, building an urgency as one person desperately searches for another. The conclusion of the poem comes in the very final word, ‘perso’, a deliberately ambiguous term which could mean either lost or dead, or indeed both. This was the reality of the camps: from the very arrival on the trains, families were separated, often never to see one another again. Spurio effectively recreates this anxiety, distress and loneliness, while forcing the reader to face the harsh realities of Auschwitz where prisoners are trapped, destroyed and mutilated. In Auschwitz inmates were completely subject to the whim of the Nazis and their lives could be ended ‘in un attimo’.

4.10 Conclusion

Poetry on the internet may not be replacing print publication, but it does represent a flourishing arena for both emerging and established poets. Einaudi publishes on average just 2,000 copies of its poetry titles,⁵⁰ while the poems in Giorgia Spurio’s *raccolta* ‘Memoria e Shoah: preghiere in versi’ have amassed a total of over 36,600 views to date.⁵¹ The number of views of course offer only a very simplistic and basic indication of general trends, but the internet’s strength as a medium for the dissemination of poetry cannot be overlooked. Publishing online is an attractive prospect for writers since there are no formal barriers, and readers from around the world can access and appraise your work instantly. Sites such as www.scrivere.info

⁵⁰ Luca Vaglio, ‘Un popolo di poeti, ma chi li legge oggi?’, 29th May 2015, www.glistatigenerali.com/letteratura/poesia-italiana-contemporanea/ [accessed 25 April 2017].

⁵¹ Figures correct as of 27th April 2017.

represent online microcosms in which authors can share their writing and receive real-time feedback from a community of other writers.

Poetry about the Holocaust continues to be written and read on the internet, offering a digital enactment of art's post-Auschwitz imperative to inform, educate and reshape society. Online writers have greater authorial freedom and expressive potential: they directly control typesetting, presentation and can include extra-textual elements such as images, music and videos to accompany their text, as well as author commentaries to complement their creative writing. Giorgia Spurio takes advantage of these additional expressive dimensions in her work and includes a number of different songs, images and typographical styles in the works analysed above, to great effect.

This chapter has, for the first time, extended the study of Holocaust poetry to analyse online poetry alongside other, more traditional forms of writing, as well as the *canzone d'autore*. Academic study of internet literature is a growing field which is still seeking ways to overcome a number of issues intrinsic to digital writing, such as concerns about safeguarding digital versions of a text, and identifying successful writing amongst the vast swathes of work published daily. Meticulous screenshots offer one solution for the presentation of online works which, as we have discussed, are fluid and dynamic and can be altered or removed from internet platforms. While screenshots fail to capture some extra-textual elements, they do provide readers with a solid base for analysis and ensure that extant versions of a poem are available should the works be removed online. With regards to concerns surrounding the quality of writing online, we've seen how internet communities such as Scrivere have developed their own form of peer review, and how reader comments and the number of views a poem receives can be adopted as a matrix for narrowing down one's search for successful internet poetry.

Bertrand Gervais questions the reader's ability to effectively engage with literature online, arguing that we are conditioned to scan, scroll and surf on a webpage, rather than to read closely. Giorgia Spurio's writing defies quick reading strategies, demanding in its complexity a more considered *impegno* on the part of the reader,

as is appropriate for a Holocaust poem. Writers such as Spurio represent the new wave of poets writing about Auschwitz, and her work stands up to the scrutiny of close reading to reveal a dedication to explore the atrocities of the Holocaust in order to inform and shape society. Spurio's online writing stacks images in order to create a sense of chaos, discord and confusion – recreating the disorientation of the camps and forcing the reader to experience, in some tiny degree, the fear and confusion of the inmates. She does not shy away from depicting violence, suffering, the murder of children, and she refuses to present the death of Holocaust victims in a redemptive way, indeed she suggests in the first poem of the collection, 'Il pianto dell'Acheronte', that even death cannot offer a release to the inmates. Spurio's conscious grouping of her works into a collection entitled 'Memoria e Shoah, preghiere in versi' outlines her desire to ensure the Holocaust will not be forgotten, as well as her continued dedication to grappling with the horror of the camps in new ways, in different poems.

Jay Ladin comments:

There is no way to witness, remember, mourn, and above all represent the Holocaust without witnessing, remembering, mourning, or representing too much or too little, too many or too few, too specifically or too abstractly, too subjectively or too objectively, too voyeuristically or from too safe a distance. To attempt to avoid these sins is to attempt to avoid the Holocaust—and as we have seen, what Holocaust poetry demands from its creators and its readers is not avoidance but embrace of the Holocaust's paradoxical imperatives⁵²

There is, in Ladin's view, no single correct way to represent the Holocaust. The solution, therefore, is to keep trying, to offer multiple attempts. Giorgia Spurio does just this, and the internet offers her, and any others willing, the space to create, shape and share her poetry about Auschwitz with others around the world. This chapter has offered evidence that online poetry about the Holocaust offers a valuable continuation of the traditions explored earlier in this thesis, and indeed we have seen how Spurio's work uses techniques used by the other, celebrated writers analysed in this thesis, including Levi, Quasimodo and Guccini. With the ever-increasing shift towards the digital world, it seems logical that writers will increasingly move to embrace the internet's unprecedented opportunities for dissemination, discussion

⁵² Ladin, "“After the End of the World””.

and interaction, all of which are fundamental for successful Holocaust poetry to fulfill its purpose to commemorate, educate and bring change.

CONCLUSION

Poetry after Auschwitz: contributions to the field

Poetry about the Holocaust occupies an ambiguous position: on the one hand Adorno's infamous assertion about its 'barbarity' is familiar to many, including readers outside of academia; on the other, there is a real, perceivable neglect of the genre in many critical discussions of Holocaust literature – especially survivor writing – due to misconceptions regarding poetry's perceived inherent fictionality and technical restrictiveness.¹ Many readers, therefore, are approaching poetry about the Holocaust with negative preconceptions which inevitably shape their engagement with the texts. This thesis has sought to offer evidence of poetry's unique communicative capacity to express the horrors of Auschwitz, in order to assert the genre's centrality to the canon of literary works about the Holocaust, and the value of engaging with these texts critically. In addition to the elevation of poetry to centre-stage, this thesis makes a number of unique contributions to the field, which will be discussed in detail below.

The span and scope of this thesis is original in its wide-ranging exploration of poetries and the way in which it places survivor-writing and non-survivor-writing side-by-side. These categories of author are generally considered in isolation in existing literature, which tends to stress the unbreachable chasm between those who experienced the camps directly, and those whose knowledge of the Holocaust has been acquired second-hand. This thesis' broad approach allows readers to get a sense of the entire body of poetry about Auschwitz and how the genre performs a range of different functions based on the position of the writer: with survivors writing for catharsis, to memorialise and to inform; while non-survivor writers, in their many manifestations, are driven by an impulse to engage and inform readers/audiences about the events of the past.

¹ For a full discussion of the relative critical neglect of survivor Holocaust poetry, please see Bethany Marston, 'Poetry as Testimony: Edith Bruck and Primo Levi' (unpublished master's dissertation, University College London, 2012).

In a similarly unprecedented step – in the academic study of Holocaust poetry – this thesis places the canonical and the popular side by side. Often forms such as the *canzone d'autore* and online poetry are not afforded the same critical attention as the published lyric poetry of established writers. My approach demonstrates that these understudied and emerging forms stand up to textual scrutiny in the same way as 'traditional' poetry and are vital and engaging components of the current and future development of poetry about Auschwitz.

This wider, unorthodox focus has allowed me to present and discuss types of poetry which are often marginalized or not yet fully established. The breadth of material analysed has permitted me to demonstrate that the impulse to create poetry about the Holocaust is not restricted to survivors and professional poets writing in the immediate aftermath of the atrocities, but is widespread and ongoing. The overview this thesis provides opens up new areas for further critical discussion (including online poetry and the intermediary, interpretative role performed by the translator), which the thesis has demonstrated make valuable and interesting contributions to the corpus of literature about the Holocaust.

Throughout the thesis I have offered a close analysis of the poems discussed, focusing on meter, punctuation, layout, syntax, form, rhyme and imagery, in order to draw out and examine the various effects created by the poets. In this way, discussion of the texts has been anchored in textual details in order to assist the reader's comprehension and appreciation of the poems. This close text-based approach delves deeper than many other works on Holocaust poetry and offers evidence from the works to support the claims and arguments made in each chapter. This approach aims to fully engage readers who are less confident working with poetry. The method adopted in this thesis elucidates the texts and demystifies them, offering not only an analysis of the poems studied, but also a methodology for readers to apply to other poetical texts. Engaging the reader and offering concrete examples of textual details and the effects they create is essential given the tendency of some critical writing on the Holocaust to marginalize or dismiss poetry, and notions of the genre's incomprehensibility and elitism. This thesis has also demonstrated that an approach

centred on textual analysis can be used to good effect not only with traditional poetry, but also with recorded songs and online poetry.

Although survivor writing has attracted the bulk of critical attention in the field of literature about the Holocaust, this thesis has further explored the notion of cathartic poetry composition. Previous works have focused on survivors' impulse to memorialise and inform but less has been said on the poet's *need* (expressed by the survivors themselves in such terms) to write poetry about Auschwitz and how it has facilitated their post-Holocaust rehabilitation. This work's adoption of close-reading brings to the fore links between poetry and trauma and survivor-guilt, as well as presenting the argument that poetry offers survivors an opportunity to rebuild and actively construct something, in contrast to their experiences of debasement and deprivation within the camps. This argument for poetry's importance in survivor recovery is significant since it further supports the claim that the poetry of survivors deserves far greater critical attention.

The in-depth discussion of the role of the translator in *O* is another example of this thesis' foregrounding of neglected areas of research within Holocaust studies. This thesis sheds light on the fundamental, but often ignored, process of language transference, which is often considered in terms of a 'loss' in Holocaust literature, if it is considered at all. I demonstrate the benefits of considering different translations side by side as a means of engaging more fully with the original (even when the reader cannot read the original language), and promotes the concept of the translator as an intermediary close-reader whose contributions should be acknowledged and discussed rather than ignored. This fresh appraisal of the role of the translator adds new depth to our reading of translated texts, which constitute a large proportion of the Holocaust works available to an Italian readership.

The discussion of online poetry about Auschwitz is unique to this work and introduces popular, amateur writing on the Holocaust into critical discussion, demonstrating that the general public continues to engage with the events of the past in poetical form. I present a methodology for analyzing poetry online which includes the meticulous documentation of screenshots and discussion of the crucial and novel

ubiquity of extra-textual elements. Discussion of reader comments is also a vital and specific feature of Chapter 4, since it demonstrates the impact of online poems on the readership, and as a result allows me to claim with a degree of confidence and certainty that these online poems are engaging and informing readers in a digital age.

The scope and methodology adopted in this thesis render it a unique contribution to the critical discussion of poetry after Auschwitz. Poetry, I have argued, provides readers with a unique framework of references, and my approach draws out and elucidates these poetical features in order to demonstrate how vital, informative and engaging poetry after Auschwitz can be. The thesis has tracked the developments of Italian literature, from hermeticism to a new focus on social engagement in the late 1940s, to the emerging acknowledgment and anthologisation of a Holocaust canon, which has become part of scholastic engagement with Auschwitz – using poetry to inform new generations about the Holocaust. Finally, the thesis has turned to a new area of increased artistic democratization, and the internet as a vital platform for the dissemination of and active and visible engagement with the Holocaust. The fresh perspective on the range and variety of poetry after Auschwitz in Italy not only encourages readers to appreciate the extraordinarily expressive potential of this genre, but also provides the means to interact closely and critically with these invaluable works.

Looking forward: the future of Holocaust poetry and final remarks

Poets' fascination with the camps and their desire to keep the memory of the Holocaust past alive continues to be in evidence over seventy years after the liberation of Auschwitz. As this thesis has demonstrated, poetical engagements with the Holocaust have taken on a wide range of forms over the decades, including survivor-writing, lyric poetry by Nobel prizewinners, to the *canzone d'autore*, translations by language professionals and online poetry by young amateurs.

Poetry about Auschwitz continues to evolve to embrace new mediums and the new opportunities these platforms offer, taking advantage of extra-textual elements such as video and music. We find ourselves in a period of transition away from the

monopoly of traditional print culture, towards Open Access, self-publication and online publication, which commentators argue has given poetry a new lease of life:

where some see poetry as a dying art, I see it as an early and enthusiastic adopter of new technologies, partly because it has to be. Why? Well, if selling what you're making isn't going to make anyone rich, but you want to share it with those who are interested, then you have to work out the cheapest way to do so.²

The internet, it seems, is increasingly offering authors – especially emerging poets – a financially viable platform, allowing the dissemination of their work and the engagement of an active community of readers and commenters. For Holocaust poetry, where, as we have established, one of the driving motivations is the desire to reach and inform as wide a readership as possible, the internet is an appealing alternative to dwindling print runs in traditional publishers.

The upward trajectory of internet publication renders it inevitable that scholars must accept and engage with new forms of writing on developing platforms. This will necessitate new methodologies for the preservation and analysis of this content, topics which have been raised previously in this thesis. While the democratic nature of the internet is to be celebrated on many levels, in the context of Holocaust poetry it is a double-edged sword, offering dedicated writers such as Giorgia Spurio the potential to engage with Auschwitz and attempt to educate, inform and stimulate discussion; the internet's accessibility also naturally leads to a proliferation of poetry of dubious quality, written with questionable motives. As discussed in the introduction, the internet is home to an increasing number of negationist writers, seeking to spread their work to audiences around the world.

At present there are no established methodologies for finding, filtering, selecting and safeguarding online content, and the option of screenshots for presenting this material effectively flattens the multi-dimensionality of the extra-textual elements. It must be hoped that as technologies develop and the study of online literature

² See Billy Mills, 'Poetry is not drowning, but swimming into new territory', *The Guardian*, 30 May 2013, Books blog. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/may/30/poetry-new-territory-sales-salt-publishing> [accessed 26 April 2018].

becomes more widely adopted, new methodologies will be developed to allow for more effective retrieval and storage of the material. While this thesis sought to establish practical, functional ways of preserving and presenting online material, the field would benefit from more sustained efforts and technologically advanced methods for storing and sharing this material for scholarly discussion.

Further study of the role of the translator and the prioritization and balancing of style and content in Holocaust poetry would also be of benefit to the field. Currently undervalued and understudied, translation literature has much to offer an analytical reader, as chapter 3 demonstrates. Providing invaluable access to a wide range of works from around the world, translators act as a pair of interpretative eyes between reader and writer, inevitably reshaping the original as they recreate it in a new language. Attention to this process, and how this can be of benefit and not simply a 'loss' as much of the present literature suggests, would further our understanding of the process which much of the Holocaust literature we read has silently undergone before it reaches us in monolingual anthologies and collections.

Finally, poetry as a testimonial form, and as a valuable genre for education and social change, deserves greater critical study. Often perceived as elitist, old-fashioned and impenetrable, poetry has been waning in popularity in recent decades, and this decline is not reserved to the general public. As Antony Rowland and Robert Eaglestone comment: '[s]trangely, some colleagues who justly pore over the intricacies of post-structuralist philosophy take fright at the mention of a pentameter.'³ This fear is unjustified since, as this thesis has demonstrated, poetry need not be difficult to understand, indeed a fundamental facet of Holocaust poetry is its capacity to be understood, for memories and experiences to be communicated successfully to new readers across generations. Greater confidence when interacting with poetry is essential to allow the genre to continue to survive and flourish. This thesis has proposed some ways in which readers can engage with poetical texts, and presented an updated close reading methodology in action in the hope that it will encourage greater interaction with these vital and vivid voices of the Holocaust.

³ Rowland and Eaglestone, 'Introduction: Holocaust Poetry', p. 1.

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